Kata

The Folk Dances of Shotokan

by

Rob Redmond





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In Gratitude

The Karate Widow, my beautiful and apparently endlessly patient wife – Lorna.

Thanks, Kevin Hawley, for saying, “You’re a writer, so write!”

Thanks to the man who opened my eyes to Karate other than Shotokan – Rob Alvelais.

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And thanks to the fans of 24FC who’ve been reading my work all of these years and for some reason keep coming back.

A very special 有難う御座いました for Katayama Hitoshi of Nagoya, Japan, for his many wise teachings.



WARNING!

The author accepts no liability or responsibility for injuries sustained by anyone resulting from the practice of any techniques or ideas presented in this work. This book contains descriptions of Karate techniques which could be dangerous to apply to another person, resulting in serious injury or death. The movements and exercises recommended in here should not be attempted by anyone without the personal guidance of a qualified instructor, nor should the movements or exercises be attempted by anyone who is not in excellent physical condition and health. Performance of these exercises and movements should not be attempted without first consulting a physician. Do not attempt to perform any of the techniques in here if you are suffering from a heart condition, pregnancy, injuries of any kind, any other illness, chronic or acute, or any handicap or disability which might be affected by physical exercise and acrobatics.



About the Author

Rob Redmond grew up in Atlanta, Georgia in the United States. From a young age he has had an interest in the martial-arts – specifically Shotokan Karate. After studying Japanese for a few years, Rob and his wife Lorna moved to Nagoya, Japan in 1993 without any prior arrangements, found work, and settled down for a two year stay.

After returning, Rob found work as a project manager in information technology while attending classes at Georgia State University, where he eventually earned an MBA in 2000.

Combining his two hobbies of Karate and Technology together, Rob was able to create a huge repository of Shotokan Karate information at 24FightingChickens.com, a web site famous for a no-holds-barred approach to self-improvement and seeking out alternatives to traditions handed down which might no longer make any sense.

This book contains the collected works from 24FightingChickens.com on the topic of kata which has been requested by so many.

Table of Contents

Introduction....8
East and West....12
War Dances....15
China....17
Gongfu Experts....20
Okinawa....23
Masters of Toudi....25
The Purpose of Kata....28
So Many Kata, So Little Time....33
The Shotokan Canon....42
Kata Are Required....46
Kata Specialization....49
The Myth of Shorin and Shorei Kata....53
Kata Names....57
Kata Names....60
Dr. Schmeisser....63
The Kata Database....66
Enbusen....71
Dai and Sho....75
Competition Kata....78
A New Old View of Kata....80
The 23 Principles of Excellent Kata....84
Principle 1: Dress to Play....86
Principle 2: Dramatic Rhythm....91
Principle 3: Reasonable Pace....93
Principle 4: Look Before Turning....95
Principle 5: Fix the Eyes....96
Principle 6: Turn Without Leaning....98
Principle 7: Coordination and Isolation....99
Principle 8: Train Across Transitions....101
Principle 9: Kiai With Confidence....102
Principle 10: Posture of a Model....105
Principle 11: Strong Flexible Stance....107
Principle 12: Precision and Accuracy....111
Principle 13: Consistency....113
Principle 14: Complete Motion....115
Principle 15: Breath Control....117
Principle 16: Swift Feet....119
Principle 17: Know the Line....121
Principle 18: Approach Without Concern....123
Principle 19: Accept Imperfection....125
Principle 20: Swing the Hips....127

Principle 21: The Geometry of Bonsai....129
Principle 22: Nail the Climax....131
Principle 23: Start Clean and Finish Strong....133
Heian....135
Heian Shodan....140
Heian Nidan....145
Heian Sandan....151
Heian Yondan....156
Heian Godan....162
Tekki....167
Tekki Shodan....171
Tekki Nidan....175
Tekki Sandan....180
Bassai-Dai....185
Bassai-Sho....196
Kanku-Dai....204
Kanku-Sho....218
Jion....226
Jiin....235
Jutte....242
Enpi....249
Hangetsu....256
Gankaku....264
Chinte....270
Sochin....276
Nijushiho....286
Meikyo....292
Gojushiho-Dai....297
Gojushiho-Sho....306
Unsu....316
Wankan....324
Appendix I. Ways to Train Kata....328
Appendix II. Known Issues....330
Bibliography....333
Net.ography....334
Index....336



Introduction

The graphic above is Nagoya Castle. I used to live in an apartment about a quarter mile away from the castle grounds. We could see the castle from our balcony. My wife and I used to take long strolls through the surrounding Meijo park underneath the cherry blossoms during the Spring in Nagoya.

Japanese architecture is very interesting. Most Japanese style buildings were originally designed with surviving some natural disaster in mind. Paper walls and windows don't kill anyone when they are blown apart by a Typhoon. The upturned corners on rooftops contain interlocking lattices of support beams which act as earthquake resistant shock absorbers.

Kata are like Japanese castles. They are beautiful, but in the beauty there is utility. What appears to be decoration is often the most useful of motions, just like the upturn corners in Japanese architecture.

The original Nagoya Castle was destroyed in 1945. The Japanese stored ordnance inside it trying to use the historical significance of the grounds to deter American bombers from hitting their ammunition stockpiles.

The bombers came anyway.

Nagoya Castle died a horrible, fiery death which is depicted inside on a gigantic photograph of the castle in flames. Nagoya was the headquarters for Mitsubishi - the makers of the famous Japanese Zero fighter planes. The city was a primary target for American forces bombing Japan to destroy her capacity to make war.

The surrounding grounds are reduced to only the inner sanctum. The outer yards and walls were never rebuilt, and the grounds are now home to the city hall and Aichi Prefecture offices. The castle itself is empty and contains nothing but empty rooms with wooden floors.

The story of Nagoya Castle is also the story of the kata of karate. The original intent of the creators of the kata, and the influences on the kata that were embedded by each person who learned them and passed them on are not written down. Today, the kata are mysterious - so much style rather than substance. The original meanings of the names, the history behind them, their origins, their authors, and their applications have been lost in the sands of time, leaving behind a Shotokan performance art. Beautiful, but utterly hollow and without meaning.

It is natural that people will search for or invent meaning where there is none.

Kata is a Japanese term meaning mold, model, style, shape, form, or data-type. A karate kata is a set number of basic techniques arranged in order. The closest relatives of the karate kata in other sports are shadow boxing, dancing, and gymnastics floor routines. The karate player begins by standing at attention, bowing, and then by stepping in some particular direction throwing karate techniques. The kata are sort of like pretend fights, and yet each kata does not realistically portray an actual fight. The kanji character for kata is composed of three more simple characters. The one in the upper left means "shape." The one in the upper right means "cut." The bottom character means "ground." A kata is a shape that cuts the ground.



The Japanese character, or kanji, for the word "kata." It is composed of three other more basic characters: shape, cut, and ground. It means "shape."

Each kata is said to have its own character. Some kata are thought to have a very heavy, solid, and robust feeling to them. While performing them you can imagine that you are plowing through the enemy like a heavy, armored tank that cannot be stopped. Other kata have some quick, light movements in them and require acrobatics. When performing these kata you can imagine yourself darting about from enemy to enemy so quickly that you never even get a good look at who you are fighting. Some are more graceful and flowing in nature, and others are performed very slowly with great muscle tension. These differences in character do not mean that the performer moves more lightly in some kata or more heavily in others. Each and every technique is executed as if it were the only technique to be performed - maximized to its fullest. Rather, it is the shape of the techniques, the foundation from which they are performed, and the rhythm of the kata itself that lends it character.

Each kata has a name, as if it were a person. Names such as Bassai, Enpi, Jion, and Sochin have been given to them over time. Some of the names are recent Japanese inventions, but most of them are Okinawan names for which we have no explanation today – and the kata are no different themselves. Like their names, some of the kata are recent inventions, and some of them are very old.

We can only read the kanji characters that the names are written with and guess at what the person who gave the name was thinking. In some cases, the source of the name is obvious. In other cases, we can only guess at the name of the kata. In fact, in many cases the kanji characters the name is written with are not known for sure, and different Asian instructors will write the kata name using different characters. Guessing at the meaning of the kata names is good fun, but hardly scientific.

The names of the kata are lost under the blowing desert sands of time. Lost forever, the tragedy of this lost knowledge adds a mystique of ancient wisdom to the kata.



This Japanese kanji is also frequently used for the word "kata." It also means "shape."

The kata have a feeling of antiquity about them, and that is one of the attractors that draw people to learn the art of karate. The idea that you are performing a routine that has been handed down from teacher to student for 50 years, and in some cases as long as 400 years, is fascinating and humbling. These exercises bring more to the performer than simple sweat and exhaustion. The kata endow the performer with a sense of timelessness.

For various reasons, the creators of the kata did not write down very much about their passion for the martial arts or the concepts that they were trying to pass along by creating the kata. Unfortunately, we have little or no knowledge of who the creators of many of the kata were, and we have no idea as to what the they were thinking when they created them.

Perhaps it is fortunate that we do not know, as we are driven to search for meaning ourselves and ponder them deeply. Doing so reveals to us much more to us than was ever really there to find, and enriches our experience of performing these artworks from the past.

The kata may be studied in a very narrow and deep fashion where the performer's only concern is technical perfection and the expression of elegantly blending beauty and technical precision. The kata may also simply be, and the performer may do them with no intention of improving or learning anything. Rather, he may simply will the kata to himself, and exercise his body while uncluttering his tortured soul.

The core of the kata experience is the gradual change from training to become like the kata you are performing to changing the kata to become you.



East and West



The Eastern mind and the Western mind are not the same. The Eastern mind, particularly the Japanese mind, is more profoundly impacted by tradition, continuity, and the connection between past and present. The Japanese mind is more easily able to accept the past for what it is and live with it without questioning why it happened and whether or not it could have been done better.

This is as it should be. The Japanese have 2000 years of history behind them. Their lifestyle has served them well for many hundreds of years, and they find comfort in knowing that what they do today was also done the same way yesterday and for many years previous.

But the Western mind has an even longer historical tradition dating back to ancient Greece. Great minds like Ptolemy, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle passed down to us a wealth of rational thought and critical reasoning. We do not thank the past. We question our ancestors and the decisions they made. We seek to push forward into new territory, not stay where we are. We should not apologize for or be ashamed of this. We should be proud of it.

When the Japanese brought karate to the United States, they opened up a new market for their services as karate instructors. They found in America that they could use the exotic and foreign nature of both themselves and their karate as a selling point and a tool for their advantage. However, they did not expect the tendency that Americans have to question the past and question authority. They were unprepared for our habit of doing away with traditions once they no longer served our purposes.

Samurai are steeped in mysticism and respect for the past. Upon receiving new information or direction from their superiors, Samurai say, “Hai!” and comply without question.

East and West

Cowboys are different. They are, above all else, practical. Cowboys do not say, “Yes sir!” and comply without question. They ask, "Why would I do that?" when given direction. They ask, “What's it good for?” when shown some new technique or piece of equipment. Upon hearing a claim that something will work well, a cowboy says, "Prove it."

Karate received the same warm welcome that most seemingly new and useful things do when it arrived on the shores of America. In the beginning, it was perceived as exotic, foreign, and sophisticated. It arrived at just the right moment in American history. The 1960's were a time of experimentation and rebellion against American tradition. Young people were looking to alternative sources, including other civilizations, for guidance and wisdom.

Karate was seen as an Eastern path to spiritual unity with the Universe. It was thought that Eastern mysticism may have answers to questions that puzzled and confused our own philosophers. Karate was popular and Americans began to accumulate years of training - as much as our Japanese instructors had when they arrived. Once American Karate instructors began to realize full competency, a debate that has been raging for at least 30 years was begun.

Do we really need to do kata?

Upon hearing their traditional values questioned, the Japanese insisted that kata were "supposed to be done." The kata routines were reportedly required and necessary. The Japanese instructors of Karate claimed that kata were to be accepted at face value. No logical justification for continuing the practice was given. No reasonable argument was made. No evidence as to the efficacy of the practice of kata was presented or shown.

Sounding like an ad campaign for an athletic shoe company, our Japanese teachers screamed at us, "Do not think! Just do!"

This is an impossible command for a cowboy to follow. “Why would I want to do that? What's it good for?”

“Prove it.”

The question is a fair one. What is kata training good for? Karate training teaches the student basic techniques and the ability to move around the room while performing them in combination. The student learns to punch, block, and kick his opponent. He quickly learns to avoid staying within range of attacks and to manipulate the distance between himself and his opponent so that he can move in, strike, and then move out. He learns to duel using his fists and feet. Eventually, after flirting with complex movements requiring youth and agility, he realizes that the most basic things he knows are the most effective and reliable.

When we examine our kata, we do not find many examples of using our hand and foot cannons to crush our enemies in straight-line attacks. Instead, we find ourselves blocking and then blocking again. It seems a very unrealistic way to fight when you think about it. Why would you block, turn in a different direction, and then block some more?

And so it was that the growing numbers of expert instructors in Western nations began asking themselves, "What are kata good for? Why are we doing it?" There is a clear, linear progression in Shotokan training from punching to stepping, from punching a stationary target to punching a moving person, and from pre-arranged encounters to free sparring. Are the kata not outside of this progression? Are the kata unrelated to fighting using Shotokan's favored methods?

Are the kata nothing more than performance art?

In order to answer those questions, we have to first examine where the kata come from. Since there is little in the way of written history about them, there is a lot of guesswork and assumption involved. There are three theories as to the meanings and the origins of kata: joint-locks, karate as-is, and war dances. Which is correct? It is impossible to know, but we must ask. It is in our nature to ask.



War Dances

Think of Hawaii. What is it that first comes to mind? A necklace of flower petals, girls in grass skirts, and the famous Hawaiian dancing.

Hawaii is not the only place on Earth that has folk dancing deeply embedded into its culture. The practice exists throughout the Pacific – including Japan and Okinawa. Folk Dances are used to tell stories from the past and store the wisdom of past generations.

Asian cultures have arranged information into explanatory folk dances for centuries.

We might believe that writing would be more efficient, but for many Asian cultures, writing was a privilege reserved to those who could afford to learn it. This is in part due to the complexity of the Chinese writing system and the time and and effort required to learn it. China, Korea, Okinawa, and Japan have each used China's beautiful writing system of ideograms. These characters, called kanji in Japan, are the root of all of East Asia's writing systems. Such writing can be artistic in a way that the Roman alphabet cannot begin to approach.

Beautiful, artistic, and mystical, the kanji may be impressive, but there is a disadvantage to such a writing system. There are around 25,000 characters, and learning to write them all is an exercise in life-long memorization. Learning even just a few thousand, the minimum necessary to write a letter home, is time consuming and very difficult. The Chinese system of writing is so complex that significant amounts of time are spent studying it instead of studying other things.

Reading and writing in China and Japan is a huge challenge of learning an impossible number of characters - no two exactly the same and many with multiple meanings. Farmers of the 17th Century didn't have time to send their children to school every morning. Free time to study academics has traditionally been reserved to the wealthy classes of all societies. Therefore, oral traditions and folk dances would have been the best way for an Okinawan farmer to pass information along.

War Dances

As descendants of the Roman Empire, we are lucky. The Roman alphabet takes us just a few months to learn, and many people learn to read it before they ever set foot in a school. We save a lot of time that the Asian nations must spend learning thousands of characters. Having a simple alphabet freed our people from having to spend such ridiculous amounts of time simply becoming literate. It is probably the reason that we did not use folk dances to explain things from one generation to another.

Asian folk dances helped them overcome the challenges of literacy. The Asian habit of creating folk dances is probably what led to the development of kata.

While some kata may have been born in Okinawa or even Japan, the concept of performing dance as combat practice was brought from China to Okinawa according to most who maintain an interest in the history of the martial arts.

The historical purpose of kata is to turn human dance into a biological data storage system. Just as a computer works today, the maximum amount of information was compressed and encrypted for future generations. However, this method of storing information is obsolete today, given our ready access to publishing and digital machines that do our remembering for us.

We have more efficient methods that free our minds to remember other things. We are now able to reference written works and TV shows and do not need to reference dance movements or drawings on cave walls.

The history of folk dancing to retain knowledge across generations is the source of kata as a concept. It probably explains why kata are so readily accepted by Chinese, Okinawans, and Japanese alike while being questioned by Westerners.

Today, with the rise of modern media to archive away Karate techniques, the kata are becoming historical footnotes instead of the critical repositories of style that they used to be.



China

Chinese martial artists are known to have participated in exchanges with the natives of Okinawa, and some Okinawans are known to have traveled to China and live there for a period before returning home. Exchange between the two nations was commonplace and is well documented. The central location of Okinawa allowed the island nation to enjoy trade with Korea, Japan, China, Formosa (modern-day Taiwan), and other Pacific Rim nations.

Sometimes Okinawa accidentally received new residents due to poor navigation or strong storms.

Okinawa traded quite a bit with the Chinese. Fukien Province in the Southeast of China was a regular destination of Okinawan travelers, and Chinese from that area traveled to Okinawa as well. According to the oral histories passed down and what few documents we have, the importation of Chinese martial arts concepts into Okinawa was very powerful and occurred repeatedly in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Given the evidence that exists, we must consider China the source for karate kata. While some kata were created later on Okinawa, the idea came to them by way of China.

Chinese that traveled to and lived in Okinawa included diplomats, travelers, and military advisors. Sometimes Fukien was a destination for Okinawa's diplomats and traders.

The famous Shaolin Temple in Henan, China is the legendary headquarters for Chinese martial art development during the Qing Dynasty which lasted for several hundred years. The Qing reined until 1911 when Western style government began to take hold. Rather than being a temple filled with mythological warrior monks, the Shaolin was more a safe house for warriors to run to and hide in while being hunted by the Qing authorities. It is

thought that from Shaolin, a gathering place for many martial arts styles in China, various styles of Chinese boxing radiated outward into the country. [1]

Whether or not the stories of the Shaolin Temple are true is irrelevant to our understanding of the history of the karate kata, however. What is important is that in the city of Fuzhou, on the coast of Southern China, several forms of Gongfu or quanfa were practiced, and it is these systems that Okinawans were exposed to several times over the course of several hundred years. Okinawan Karate is at least heavily influenced if not entirely based on various Chinese systems as they existed when the Okinawans learned them.

功夫 **Gongfu** is a Cantonese term which means "skill." In particular, it refers to a skill acquired through effort and perseverance. However, the average Chinese understands that this term refers to martial arts in the South of China. You have probably read this word as “Kung Fu” before. It is the same word, but Gongfu is considered a more accurate Romanization of the Cantonese.

拳法 **Quanfa** is Mandarin Chinese and means "fist rule" or "fist law." The Japanese pronounce this word as "Kenpo" or "Kempo."

When referring to martial arts in China during the 19th Century, one or the other term is generally used. There are other terms to describe all martial arts of China, such as wu shu and quanshu, but Quanfa and Gongfu are the ones we will deal with.

In China, what we call a kata is referred to as a "quan". In the martial arts practiced in Fuzhou, each quan was considered to be the central training device of a fighting system. Thus, if you learned a fighting system from an instructor, you learned the quan for that system and practiced your art through that quan and exercises that centered around it.

The Chinese, unlike many today, did not subscribe to the silly notion that we limit ourselves to only one system of fighting out of some misplaced sense of loyalty to one and only one instructor during a lifetime. They seem to have felt that different systems were appropriate for different situations, and they studied with the instructors who knew the systems they wanted to learn.

When passing their martial arts to the Okinawans, the Chinese generally handed over these quan, some of their documentation on vital points, strategy, and herbal remedies, and whatever went into the practice of the quan of which today we are unaware.

The systems that they passed along were White Crane, Five Ancestors, Monk Fist, Dragon Fist, Lion Boxing, Dog Boxing, and Tiger Fist boxing to name a few.[2] We do not necessarily know from which Chinese system our current kata sprang because the Chinese were not shy about changing and revising what they practiced.

As is so often true of colony societies, the Okinawans seem to have done a pretty good job of preserving what they learned while the Chinese were more liberal in their approach

[1] McCarthy, Patrick. The Bible of Karate Bubishi. (Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1995) 30.
[2] Bubishi, 38.

and modified it heavily. In fact, as we will see, the two dominant systems of Okinawan Karate differ from each other primarily because they are based on encounters with the same Chinese martial arts during different time periods.

We lack the documentation of what each Chinese teacher did. But we do know a little about these men who taught the Okinawans Gongfu.

China



Gongfu Experts

Several Chinese taught Okinawans their Gongfu quan in Fuzhou, China when the Okinawans visited them. Other Chinese are known to have lived in Okinawa itself and have passed along tutoring while living there. These men are the source of the concept of kata for all of Japanese and Okinawan karate. Knowing about them will help us understand where some of the kata come from.

The men we are interested in are Iwah, Ason, Chinto, Ryuru Ko (Xie Zhongxiang), Wai Xinxian, and Kushanku (Kung Hsiang-Chun).

Kung Hsiang-Chun (circa 1730~1800). This man, called Kushanku in the dialect of Okinawa and Kosokun in mainland Japanese, is thought to have been an envoy to Okinawa during the late 18th and early 19th Century. His arrival in Okinawa resulted in our practicing the kata known as Kanku-Dai today. Whether Kung Hsiang-Chun brought this quan to Okinawa or the Okinawans created it from elements they had learned from him is unknown. He was apparently from Fuzhou, China, brought many of his disciples with him, and stayed in Okinawa some time.[3] This is thought to have happened in 1756.[4]

The name Kung Hsiang-Chun is more of a title than a real name and means something like "envoy." It is possible that he never existed and is merely a symbolic metaphor for other people or a group of people, but that seems unlikely.

This is not implausible since many Chinese from Fuzhou stayed in Okinawa for extended times on matters of business or government. Given that Shuri was the seat of government in Okinawa, and Naha the largest port city, it is not unlikely that the Okinawans would have a lot of contact with such people. What style of Chinese boxing Kung Hsiang-Chun studied is unknown.

Wai Xinxian. Not much is known about this man other than his name and that he was a friend and associate of Xie Zhongxiang (below). He is thought to have taught Monk Fist

[3] Bubishi, 32.

[4] Cook, Harry, Shotokan Karate A Precise History. (England: Cook, 2001) 9.

Boxing in Fuzhou, China to a famous Okinawan instructor who moved there for a period, but no one is really sure. He is thought by some to be a little older than Xie Zhongxiang.[5]

Xie Zhongxiang (1852-1930). Known by the nick-name Ryuru Ko, this man was a friend of Wai Xinxian's and taught Gongfu in Fuzhou as well to Okinawans who traveled to meet him. He was the founder of the Whooping Crane style of Gongfu and probably studied White Crane and other systems - synthesizing them into his own method.[6]

Chinto. This man is more myth than reality, but it is told that Chinto, a Chinese pirate, washed up on Okinawa's shores with his crew. A famous Okinawan expert in martial arts was sent to clobber him, and when they fought, the match was a tie. Chinto remained on Okinawa for a period and taught the principles behind the Chinto kata - or perhaps the kata itself. Chinto is called Gankaku in Shotokan.[7]

Ason. Very little is known about this man, but he is credited with teaching the Naifanchi kata to a famous Okinawan. Some believe that the kata was originally one single unit, but has since been broken into two parts, had a third part added, and is now called Tekki in Shotokan. Ason taught in Fuzhou, China. The Okinawans that studied under him traveled there to learn.

Iwah. A military attaché like Ason, Iwah also lived in Fuzhou, China and taught Quanfa to Okinawans who traveled there.[8]

Chiang Nan is the source of the two Channan kata. He was a diplomat sent from Fukien province in China out to Okinawa. While living there, he taught Matsumura Sokon two kata. Matsumura taught them as Channan Sho and Channan Dai, but changed the name to Ping An. Eventually, they were broken up into five kata called the Pinan by Itosu Yasutsune. We know them today in Shotokan as the Heian and teach them as basic kata.[9]

Most of these men were known to teach their Gongfu in a compound in Fuzhou City, China where the Okinawans went to live while doing exchanges with China. What is most interesting about this is that it shows that the old legends about Chinese washing up on shore and teaching their secret arts to Okinawan peasants are untrue. These men, with the exception of Chinto, were government officials with diplomatic status. They did not interact with farmers and fishermen. They interacted with their high-ranking and wealthy counterparts from Okinawa.

Also interesting to note is that it is unclear who was in Okinawa and who was in China. The Okinawans, who we will look at next, were all in the habit of traveling to and staying in Fuzhou as much as the Chinese traveled to and stayed in Naha and Shuri on Okinawa.

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[5] Bubishi, 34.

[6] Bubishi, 34-39.

[7] Internet: Shito-Kai.com, found July 29, 2003. This article provides an excellent summary of the life and times of Matsumura Sokon, probably the central historical figure in the development of Shuri style karate which we now practice in Japanified form as Shotokan.

[8] Cook, 287.

[9] Internet: Shito-Kai.com. Others disagree about the existence of Ch'ang An, and think that this is actually the name of a city, perhaps a one-time capital of China.



Okinawa



The Chinese are known to have traveled to Okinawa and to have brought their fighting arts with them. We also know that Okinawans went to Fuzhou, China for business and for martial arts training. They were rapidly absorbing what they could from Fuzhou's Gongfu experts and were bringing what they had learned home.

Legend says that as karate developed on Okinawa, the styles of practice supposedly became known by the names of three cities: Tomari, Shuri, and Naha. Many martial arts writers recount the styles of Tomari, Shuri, and Naha and compare and contrast the kata that came from the systems of karate that supposedly flourished in each city.

But it is only a story told so many times and with such conviction that it becomes dogma. The karate of Okinawa, known as Toudi, was not based in city-centered systems. In fact, it was not systematized at all. Rather, the karate of Okinawa was developed from Chinese martial arts by several different Okinawans during the 19th Century, and they developed their kata themselves - handing them down to students as they met them.

It is true that the men who are most famous come from Naha and Shuri. Shuri was the seat of government for Okinawa's Kings. They lived in Shuri castle. Since most of the karate men of the 19th Century were also in the employ of the government in some regard, they tended to be in the area of Shuri. And because Naha is the major port city of Okinawa, they would also have tended to be in that area as well.

Or maybe it was because Naha, Shuri, and Tomari are less than two miles apart from each other, and anyone can walk from Shuri to Naha in just 20 minutes.



Many have written as though there were three distinct systems of karate called Shuri-Te, Naha-Te, and Tomari-Te, but the names were not given until 1926, and by then, Shotokan was already going in Japan full speed ahead. It is better, I think, to conceive of the history of karate as men who taught one another what they had learned and the overlap of students with a common teacher. It was not until the early 20th Century that karate began to be taught in a systemized way and organized around groups of people doing similar things.

Okinawans called their native art Toudi 唐手, which is written using characters that mean “T'ang”, for the T'ang Dynasty in China, and “hand”. Supposedly this art was flourishing as well, and the teachings of the Chinese in Fuzhou and around Shuri were incorporated into it to form the art that eventually evolved into Shotokan, Shito-Ryu, Goju-Ryu, Shorin-Ryu, and Uechi-Ryu.

The kata of Okinawa were dispersed as they were not because of the way Okinawa's native martial art flourished, but because of the particular Chinese experts of Gongfu. Chinese martial arts were spawned in the places where returning Okinawans chose to live when they came home. The differences in their teachings are the result of the different men with whom the Okinawans trained in China and Okinawa and the time period during which they went to China.

Okinawa



Masters of Toudi

White Crane, Praying Mantis, Monkey style, and other martial arts styles were brought to Okinawa to create what would one day end up in Japan as karate. We don't know from what Chinese styles exactly our kata come from. We cannot trace them back accurately due to missing records. We can only speculate.

In order to figure out where our kata come from, I have read Harry Cook's *Shotokan a Precise History*, Patrick McCarthy's *Bubishi*, Shoshin Nagamine's *Tales of Great Okinawan Masters*, hundreds of web sites, and a few other books as well. Of all of these books, the one upon which I rely most heavily and think the most highly of is “The Cookbook,” which is how I refer to Harry Cook’s masterpiece. I highly recommend that you obtain a copy of Cook’s latest edition if at all possible. If you find a copy, you have found gold.

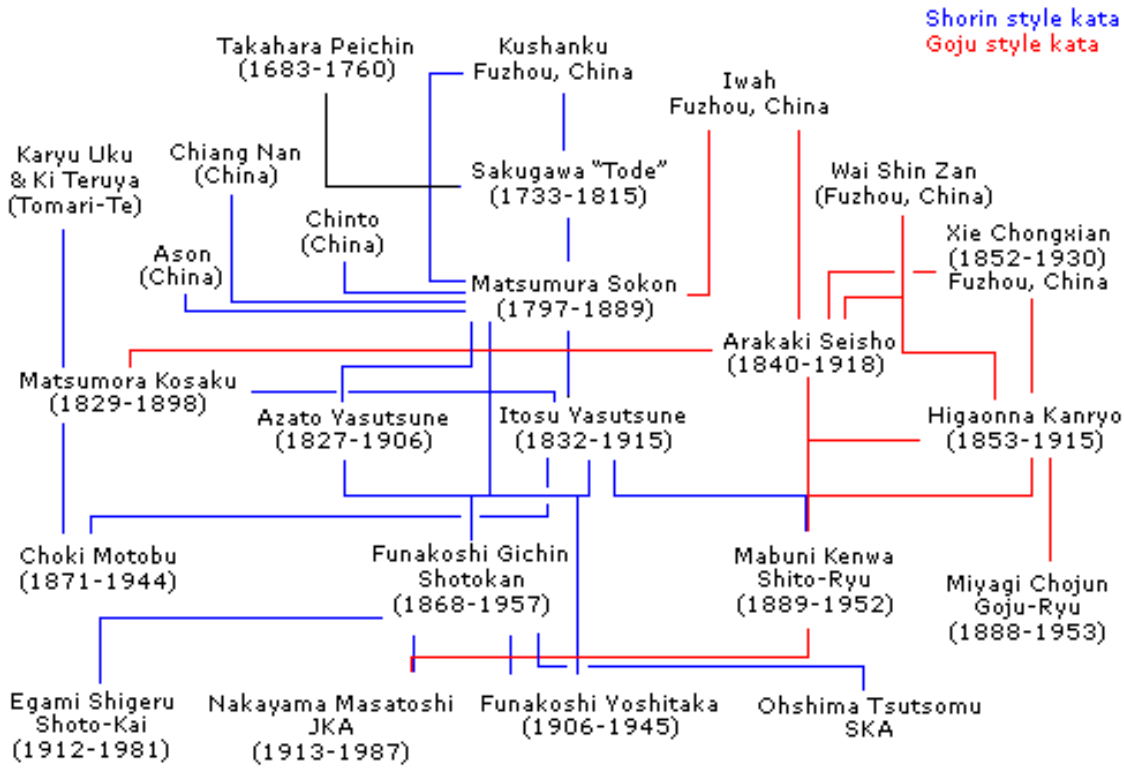
From what I have been able to piece together, I have constructed a chart showing the flow of our kata making their way through time to us in Shotokan. Most of the kata we practice come to us from way back in time farther than I would have thought before doing this research. Suparinpei (Peichurin), Sanseiryu, Sanchin, Seisan, Kururunfa, Seipai, Nippaipo, Niseishi, Useishi, Unshu, Sochin, Naihanchi, Channan (to become our Pinan), Jutte, and perhaps even Kushanku were either learned in Fuzhou, China or were brought to Okinawa from that city.

From what I can tell, there are two different types of karate kata in Okinawa from China. Some of them have very typical opening sequences of very tense, very slow middle level blocking and punching that we associate as being Naha kata today. Others seem to involve faster techniques and seem to match with what most people consider Shuri's style. But what I find most surprising is that the more I learn about the original forms of our kata, the way they were done before the Japanese ever got their hands on them, the more I realize that these kata are difficult to differentiate into "groups."

In China, each of these quan was a system. On Okinawa, they were learned and assimilated into the various personal styles of Toudi preferred by individual experts on Okinawa and lost some of their Chinese character. So, while today it is clear that one group, the so-called Naha group was clearly not included in Karate-do Kyohan and were learned by Nakayama Masatoshi, the leader of the largest Shotokan-based athletic association from 1948 until his death in 1987, from Mabuni Kenwa, the founder of the Shito-Ryu style. there really isn't a Naha group. These kata were all individual quan from external styles of Gongfu. I guess what I am trying to say is that the Shuri/Naha groupings based on slow vs. fast really doesn't work after you view them as being from China. It's more a temporary status they existed in on Okinawa for only 120 years or so. They've been off Okinawa in various forms of Japanese and Okinawan karate for nearly as long.

I colored the Chinese names so the injection of their knowledge and the flow of their teachings by color would be obvious. As you can see, Matsumura Sokon is a node through which all of the blue lines flowed. Aragaki Seisho and Higaonna (or Higashionna depending on who you read) Kanryo are both nodes for the red lines that formed so-called Naha style.

10 11 & 12



[10] Internet: http://www.shitokai.com/matsumura.html. The author describes the life and times of Matsumura Sokon and his learning from Ason - largely from oral history.

[11] Internet: http://www.shitokai.com/matsumura.html. The author describes the life and times of Matsumura Sokon and his experience with Chinto from oral history.

[12] Cook, Harry, *Shotokan Karate A Precise History*. (England: Cook, 2001) 1-46.

There are only four people on the chart who receive both flows: Matsumora Kosaku, Matsumura Sokon, Kenwa Mabuni, and then Nakayama Masatoshi.

This kind of chart or family tree has been used for almost a century by people interested in learning where their Karate skills came from and how they were passed down from previous centuries. Despite the information that this chart conveys, there is other information that such a genealogical study of the flow of Karate knowledge does not provide.

The most important missing piece from this chart are the not-so-famous peers of the men listed here. It is the cross-pollination of information between peers, which is a very real learning experience for everyone who takes up the martial arts.

Here is a place that the men of the East and West can see eye to eye on: Both are notorious for crediting only their fathers and never their brothers and friends. Both track in a linear fashion backward from themselves through to famous and popular historical figures, and in so doing, we fail to credit the many living people around us who have contributed to our learning or sacrificed of themselves for us.

During the era where Funakoshi, Mabuni, and Miyagi were in ascension in the early 20th Century, the word Toudi was gradually replaced by the word Karate, which is a more Japanese word. T'ang was replaced by the kanji meaning "void", "sky", or "empty."



***T**he kanji for "Kara-Te", which means Empty Hand. This way of writing it became fashionable in the early 20th Century as Japanese Nationalism was on the rise and interest in things from China was on the decline.*



The Purpose of Kata

Kata were imported originally from China where they were called quan and were practiced each as an individual fighting system's total collection of style, strategy, and techniques. The kata were imported by the Okinawans either by meeting with Chinese during their visits to Fuzhou or during Chinese visits to Okinawa. One way or another, many kata made their way to Okinawa.

On Okinawa, the kata were modified, combined, separated into parts, or passed on almost intact. Some of the kata were created on Okinawa, and perhaps a few of the supposedly older kata we practice in Shotokan were created in Japan during or after the 1930's.

Where the facts blur into speculation is the topic of their purpose. You see, we have a problem today in that our instructors only ever practiced the Shotokan kata historically as routines of basic techniques – a kind of performance art shown off in tournaments and exhibitions.

We asked our Japanese instructors, "What does this represent? What am I practicing to do here?"

The Japanese knew that Westerners were not going to be happy hearing, "The kata have no meaning. No one showed me any meaning for these things. JUST DO IT YOU STUBBORN FOREIGN BARBARIAN!" Well, maybe a couple of them tried saying that to us, and the results quickly taught them to try to come up with something to show.

As the years have gone by, it has become more and more apparent that Shotokan Karate clubs practice kata as dance routines – strings of basic techniques to be performed alone.

But what was the original purpose of the kata, and was there originally more information in the instruction book that now seems to be impossible to locate? There have been so many arguments long those lines it is really difficult to say. But there are a few prevailing theories.

A few of those theories are presented here:

The Jujutsu applications were lost. Some people are convinced that the kata are actually a clever way to remember an entirely different way of moving in combat. They believe that kata are truly Jujutsu techniques which have been styled and restyled to the point that they are hardly recognizable. The people who feel this way are convinced that the applications they have been shown by their instructors for the movements are the originally intended meanings for each of the movements in the kata. Their claim is that Shotokan has become watered down, that critical information has been lost. Most people believe the information was lost because of the rise of Sport Karate and competitive tournament interest. Others have proposed that Shotokan in particular has become watered down because Funakoshi, while an excellent politician and diplomat, was not very skilled nor very informed about the inner meanings of the Karate he brought to Japan, mostly because he was teaching children in Okinawa, and therefore had never really struggled to learn the inner meanings of many of the more secret techniques.

Funakoshi intentionally watered down Karate. Another theory is that Funakoshi watered down the Karate that he taught in the attempt to create something safe for the whole family to do. The theory is that he was concerned primarily with creating a sport or athletic activity that would spread Japanese good manners around the world, and in order to popularize it, he removed the more dangerous techniques.

Kata are war dances. A theory I have proposed is that kata were originally war dances. In other words, techniques were cataloged using the folk dance technique of East Asia. It is possible that the originators practiced the kata as dances thinking that the repetition of these routines without a partner would somehow mysteriously and organically give them superior fighting ability (something that very few people today believe). While the originators probably each had explanations for the meaning of each technique in their kata, their primary method of practice was probably solitary.

The truth is that no one knows. Every possibility is equal, and anyone with an imagination knows as much as anyone else does. It is not possible to be a scholar on the subject of the history of kata practice because the Okinawans did not document their work.

We do know that a long time ago people punched and kicked each other for sport. They also wrestled one another. Such combat methods are not unique to Asia. Such fighting methods are probably older than language itself. Asian nations their knowledge in folk dances. Thus, it was entirely natural to develop combat folk dances.

It is also likely that folk dances used to pass on other knowledge were practiced, seen as a useful practice in the aid of fighting, and then adopted and changed to become kata. Kata probably come from both origins: folk dances converted to fighting, and remembered battles and fighting methods. As the kata were mainly organized and created before the artificial separations we call martial arts and styles today, they are probably encoded using every possible form of fighting known to the creator at the time without any division between grappling, punching, or using weapons.

Kata probably evolved to become the central theme of fighting training in China and Okinawa. As the kata concept was adopted for fighting, the fighting methods probably changed to match the demands of the kata.

Kata today are an anachronistic, antique training method left over from the days when no other media truly existed to accurately record Karate knowledge. Some people believe that Karate was more of an art like Jujutsu that involved arm bars, joint locks, nerve strikes, and other entangling, grappling, non-Shotokan fighting methods.

Take a class in Shorin-Ryu, an art that is descended from the very roots of Shotokan. Shorin-Ryu avoids all of the Shotokan emphasis on very pretty techniques that are so precise you could perform eye surgery with them. Instead of rotating the hips and keeping the rear heel down for maximum output, Shorin-Ryu focuses more upon tangling up the opponent in a spider web of twisty joint manipulations. In Shorin-Ryu, after you get the enemy all twisted up and off balance, then you hit him. And, maybe you hit him before you twist him up so that he won't resist you as much.

In Shotokan, we use our punches and kicks like guided missiles. The missile slips past the enemy's defenses and hits him so hard in a soft spot that he's out of the fight. And even if the technique can't find a soft spot, it's so overdeveloped that it is still likely to maim whatever it happens to land on.

Shotokan is a distinctly Japanese art. Funakoshi arrived in Japan just in time for the middle of Japan's gigantic military campaign of aggression against the entire Pacific Ocean and Asia. At war with all of her neighbors, Japan was probably not in the best mood to accept a foreign art. Funakoshi therefore worked to make karate something that Japan could call her own.

Japan already had the growing art of Judo. Funakoshi worked to make karate more like Judo. Japan also had a national pastime of sword fighting called Kendo. Karate was easily adapted to the Kendo competition style: two men dueling at a distance, each working to outsmart the other in order to tag him with a single technique - a metaphor for a killing blow. A little Judo here, a little Kendo there, and Karate was fully Japanified. All that remained was to develop a way to practice live techniques for military training and athletic sport so that the art would become popular all over war hawk Japan - and in the nations that she conquered.

Since you cannot twist necks and break them in athletic competition or military training, those types of techniques became less practiced, and instead the techniques that were possible to control became the center of the art: the ballistic strikes of punching and kicking. Just like Kendo, where two men take bamboo swords and try to tag each other, Shotokan became an art that emphasized only a few techniques and very subtle distancing and timing.

And why wouldn't Funakoshi and his students do that? Almost all of the Japanese who learned karate back in the day were kendo experts. Nakayama accidentally stumbled onto his first karate class while looking for his daily kendo class at school.

So, here we are today studying an empty-handed Kendo called Shotokan. How ironic that the kata, which probably began as a separate appendage that a few fighters adopted as an

alternative training method centuries ago, have once again become little more than an alternative training method for the Shotokan style.

What to do with the traditional kata? The kata were handed down from the past, and being Japanese with a strong sense of historical connection to the past, they could not allow a tradition to be tossed aside out of pragmatism. So, they paid homage to history by doing kata at the end of training, just not as much as before. As time went by and better training methods for learning to win sparring matches were found, the kata were practiced less and less.

That doesn't mean that there is no value in kata as performance art. There is a lot of value there that can be harvested from the practice of kata. But it does mean that most of us think that the kata are mostly just that: dances that we perform when we have to test for a belt. And, it also means that in order to be really good at sparring, kata is not the way to go. No matter which theory you believe, kata are not intended nor a productive practice that will improve your sport sparring skills. Kumite (sport sparring) is a new direction for karate, and it is best trained for by practicing kumite drills of increasing complexity.

If you allow me to continue wildly speculating about the possible past of the kata of which no one truly can be sure, there are, in reality, two fighting arts compressed and encrypted in modern Shotokan Karate training. One art is a punching and kicking art of attack with some blocks thrown in for emergencies, and the other art is a defensive joint-locking system that also uses strikes, but utilizes the things we call blocks as two-handed techniques with a cover and a strike in each of them.

What does all of this mean? It means that first you have to learn your basic techniques. Without all of the punches and kicks, neither art form will work. It also means that all of the skills you learn doing sparring drills can combine with your practice of kata to be applied in some pretty complicated defenses. However, it also becomes clear that kata aren't giving a lot back in the other direction.

This is great news for all of us! It means that by obsessing over the basic techniques in Shotokan, we have built up amazing levels of skill in the striking portion of the other art. It also means that performing all of those kata wasn't such a bad thing after all, because now you have quite a data warehouse you can query for many hundreds of thousands of defensive maneuvers.

If you want to learn nothing but basic techniques and some sparring drills, you will be on a solid path toward competition sparring. And, thanks to our friends in Japan, those simple strikes are refined to such a ludicrous degree that they are still useful in a fight, perhaps even over-kill. So, not learning all of the Jujutsu stuff is not a total loss for you. Your ability to target, time, distance, and then fire a lightning fast punch might be all anyone needs to wipe out an entire street gang. It is an amazing and useful skill.

If one day you get older and decide you are bored with punching and kicking, you can then switch tracks without really switching tracks, because everything you have learned up to this point supports the learning of all of the joint locking and Jujutsu art.

Whether those techniques are truly the original intent of the creators of the kata or their caretakers is irrelevant. Reverse engineered or passed down through the ages, valid fighting techniques found in kata are valid fighting techniques, and once you begin looking, they start to fall out of the trees like overripe apples.

Stretching Our Abilities. Kata practice certainly forces us to learn something that we would not have asked of ourselves without having been handed the template from someone else. Learning someone else's kata helps us explore our potential and learn our limits. Making up our own movements in the beginning of our Karate practice only results in us repeating things we can already do, and it is not nearly as challenging. Kata serve this function well, and as we mature, we move from obedient learning to loyal repetition, and finally to selective preference and finally, hopefully, to creation in order to pass down our own challenge to the next generation.

The Purpose is Yours. No one can tell you what the purpose of your practice of Karate is. You decide what your purpose for taking up Karate as an activity is. This also applies to the practice of kata. The practice of kata will ultimately be what you make it, not what someone scribbles on rice paper and hangs on the wall in a pretty frame. If you want to do kata applications and ignore sport sparring, you can. If you want to learn war dances and revel in the repetition of something beautiful handed down through generations, you can do that too. And the really wonderful thing is that you do not have to choose. You can have it all. You are the decision maker, and the sooner you become comfortable with that, the more advanced your practice of Karate becomes.



So Many Kata, So Little Time

Someone out there must think there is a benefit to kata training, because a long list of kata have escaped the island of Okinawa to be practiced not only in Japan, but also all over the world. I think there are about 150 kata being practiced right now in the Japanese and Okinawan styles of karate. That's 150 distinctly different kata. Most of the kata were developed on Okinawa.

Following is a list of all of the Japanese and Okinawan kata that I have been able to find either being practiced, named in texts, or archived in extensive volumes of photographs.

When I think of the differences between similar kata, I note the following possible reasons why kata look the same or have the same name and yet have major tactical differences between them:

- **Revisions**. Each Karate expert through time introduces his own preferences into the kata he practices. Though this practice is dying out thank to the standarization required to support Karate as a worldwide sport with rules, kata vary from style to style because the people who handed them down tweaked them or created different versions all for themselves. Thus, multiple versions of the same kata exist today.

- **Evolution**. When two or more kata have the same name, it could be that the creator taught the kata to one person who passed that version on, then changed his practice and taught that to someone else who passed the later version on. Multiple versions can come from the same person, just as Naha style Karate and Shuri style Karate are different because of the different time periods in which the Okinawans imported techniques from Fuzhou City. Each student of an expert becomes a snapshot of what that instructor was doing at the time.

- **Creativity**. Sometimes a kata was shown to someone, they liked only parts of it, and then created their own kata from the source of the original kata. Sochin, a Shotokan kata, is very, very loosely based on two kata from Shito-Ryu. Sochin is

a great example of a kata of recent origin that was based on other kata.

Due to the nature of the Chinese, Okinawan, and Japanese reliance upon ideogram characters (kanji) to write with, the exact pronunciation of a kata name is not necessarily fixed. So, a kata with a two character name could be pronounced in up to four different ways, and no one would ever know the original pronunciation.

During the time when Funakoshi first began introducing kata into mainland Japan, his astute sense of political trends told him that Japan was in a nationalized state and perhaps not interested in things with Okinawan or Chinese names. So, he tried to come up with a purely Japanese name for the kata he taught. In some cases Funakoshi's renaming project worked, and in other cases, his efforts failed and his students never stopped using the Okinawan name. Thus, Shotokan kata in particular have a mixture of ancient and new names, and it is quite random as to which is the commonly used name and which is only a bit of trivia to remember.

As we have covered already, on Okinawa, a "style" of Karate did not exist until the 20th Century. Before then, each Karate expert taught Karate his particular way, so a "style" was a one-man show. Because of the invention of Karate styles back in the 1930's, there has been considerable history revision to create styles by dividing Okinawan Karate into three parts: Shuri, Tomari, and Naha styles.

However, these three cities were only a couple of miles away from each other, thus, are the divisions legitimate, or does it just happen that this instructor and that one who managed to have their kata preserved lived in these places?

Because of this, I really am not interested in the source city or style of a Karate kata, but more interested in the person who originated it and the era in which it was created.

By looking at kata this way, we begin to see them as artistic creations of individuals, not possessions of cities or methodologies. The boundaries we imagine around styles are more a matter of human social consequence than they are functionally useful. In fact, may I suggest that style names are useful to the owners of athletic associations trying to organize sporting events. For we individual practitioners, the rules of sport are actually a hindrance and get in the way of our learning and development.

The 12 Kata of Okinawan Goju-Ryu

Seisan	十三	13
Suparinpei	壱百零八	108
Saifa	砕破	Break/smash
Seiunchin	制引戦	System for pulling in battle
Sanchin	三戦	Three Wars
Kururunfa	久留頓破	Sudden Attack After Waiting
Sanseiryu	三十六	36
Shisochin	四向戦	4 Front War
Tensho	転掌	Rotating Palms
Seipai	十八	18
Gekisai (2)	撃砕	Pulverize

The 18 Kata of Okinawan Shorin-Ryu

Fukyugata (2)	普及型	Wide Reach Kata
Pinan (5)	平安	Easy
Naihanchi (3)	内半戦	Half way through a battle
Ananku	安南空	Fight Against Oppression
Wankan	腕貫	King's Crown
Rohai	鷺牌	Heron Image
Wanshu	汪楫	Chinese Surname
Passai	抜塞	Extract from a fortress
Gojushiho	五十四方	54 steps
Chinto	戦東	Fighting to the East
Kushanku	公相君	"Mr. Diplomacy"

The Kata of Okinawan Ryuei-Ryu

Anan	安南	Southern Safety
Heiku	黒虎	Black Tiger
Pachu	巴球	Spiral
Paiho	白鶴	White Crane
Niseishi	二十四	24
Sanseiryu	三十六	36
Seienchin	制引戦	Fight Against Oppression
Seisan	十三	13
Paiku	白虎	White Tiger
Ohan		

Sanchin	三戦	Three Wars

The Native Kata of Japanese Shito-Ryu

These are kata created by Mabuni Kenwa, founder of Shito-Ryu. Shinpa is based on Uechi's Karate. Nipaipo is based on Gokenki's.

Aoyagi	青柳	Clam
Juroku	十六	16
Myojo	明浄	Bright Clarity
Shinpa	新破	New Breakaway
Happo Sho	八方掌	Small Eight Directions
Shinsei (2)	新生	New Life
Shiho Kosokun	四方公相君	Four Directions Kosokun
Kenshu	拳秀	Fist Genius
Kensho	賢掌	Talented Palms
Nipaipo	弐八方	28 Directions

Shito-Ryu Kata from Goju Ryu (Higashionna Kanryo)

Seisan	十三	13
Suparinpei	壱百零八	108
Saifa	砕破	Break/smash
Seienchin	征遠鎮	Put Down a Distant Rebellion
Sanchin	三戦	Three Wars
Kururunfa	久留頓破	Sudden Attack After Waiting
Sanseiryu	三十六	36
Shisochin	四向戦	4 Front War
Tensho	転掌	Rotating Palms
Seipai	十八	18
Unshu	雲手	Cloud Hands
Sochin	壮珍	Grand Suppression

Shito-Ryu Kata from Shorin Ryu (Itosu Yasutsune)

Pinan (5)	平安	Easy
Naihanchi (3)	内半戦	Half way through a battle
Ananku	安南空	Fight Against Oppression
Wankan	腕貫	King's Crown
Rohai	鷺牌	Heron Image
Wanshu	汪楫	Chinese Surname
Bassai-Dai	抜塞大	Extract from Fortress (big)

Bassai-Sho	抜塞小	Extract from a fortress (sm)
Matsumura Bassai	松村の抜塞	Matsumura's Bassai
Tomari-Bassai	止の抜塞	Tomari's Bassai
Oyadomari-Bassai	親止の抜崔	Oyadomari's Bassai
Gojushiho	五十四方	54 steps
Chinto	戦東	Fighting to the East
Kosokun-Dai	公相君大	Big Kosokun
Kosokun-Sho	公相君小	Small Kosokun
Yara Kosokun	公相君	Yara's Kosokun
Jion	時恩	Debt of Gratitude to the Temple
Jitte	十手	Ten Hands/Ten Men
Jiin	寺院	Temple Grounds
Matsumura Seisan	松村の十三	Matsumura's Seisan
Matsumura Rohai	松村の鷺牌	Matsumura's Rohai
Niseishi	二十四	24
Tomari Wanshu	止の汪楫	Wanshu of Tomari City
Matsukaze	松風	Pine Wind

Shito-Ryu Kata from Chinese White Crane (Go Kenki)

Hakutsuru	白鶴	White Crane
Papporen		

This list of kata is not complete nor is it completely accurate. You won't find any citations at the end of this book for the kanji and meanings that I have provided above, as no source is reliable on the topic and can be considered expert. The people who named these kata are dead and gone for the most part, and what they were thinking when they named a kata was usually never written down.

Known issues with the list above:

- Some kata are not written in kanji by the Japanese. Instead, they write the names in katakana – meaning that they consider the word foreign to their language and of no meaning.
- Sometimes the kanji I have are perhaps wrong and inserted by well-meaning Japanese who are trying to provide a kanji and fill a gap.
- Sometimes Japanese write with sound-alike kanji when they don't know the correct kanji so as to appear more educated.

- Different instructors use different kanji in Japan to build these names, because there is no single official source for the correct way to write these names.

- Some of these kata I have not even seen, though I have seen most of them.

The purpose of this list is not to provide a 100% accurate accounting for kata flying out of Okinawa like bats out of a cave. Not at all. I provide this list to give you some idea of how the kata of Okinawa's two major systems, plus a lesser known Okinawan system and Chinese White Crane have contributed kata which were all collected up in the system Shito-Ryu.

As you will see later on, these kata were not passed down to Shotokan's modern canon of kata. Shotokan has been driven with a reductionism philosophy in mind, emphasizing a very narrow curriculum with a very deep practice level. I feel that this practice method has great merit.

However, I also believe in balance, and I believe in enjoying myself. So I don't always learn a kata in order to put myself through a grueling period of suffering and discipline out of which I emerge a new, enlightened being. Sometimes, I just like learning a new kata for fun.

This list is a sample of what is out there, still alive in the world, available to you to study under the heading Nakayama called "Free Kata."

Interesting list, isn't it. I have no idea where some of these kata come from or what they look like. I have tried getting my hands on materials about some of them, and have come up short. However, with the expansion of the Internet and increasing amounts of video of people performing kata online, you can find a lot of these and take a look at them.

One of the kata I left off of the list is Channan, because I'm not sure anyone regularly practices this kata other than a select few people. Channan has been documented by Dr. Elmar Schmeisser in a book called "Channan: Heart of the Heian."

Also note the ways in which the kata share names. You will see Hakutsuru, which means "White Crane" used repeatedly, but sometimes it is pronounced Paiho, Hakucho, Shirocho, or Shirotsuru. Another example is the kata Sochin. Shotokan has a Sochin which is only very, very distantly similar to the Shorin-Ryu Sochin. Shotokan's version was created in Japan by someone, probably Funakoshi's son, who learned the original from Shito-Ryu, liked the name and perhaps four of the techniques, and then trashed the rest and turned it into a display of rooted stance techniques. The kata are related, but you'd have to be an expert in both to see it.

Some kata with the same name in different styles look unrelated. This may be because they actually are unrelated, or because one of these kata is based on the other, a heavily revised version, or an attempt to remember the kata that failed and ended up damaged goods.

An excellent example of the latter is the Jiin practiced in Shotokan. Shotokan's Jiin is, in my belief, the result of someone learning the Shito-Ryu kata Jiin, then forgetting some of

the techniques, and making arbitrary changes more indicative of forgetfulness than of intentional, driven improvement.

Sometimes there is more than one unique kata with the same name. Gojushiho comes in two flavors in Shotokan, but only one flavor in Shito-Ryu. The Shotokan versions look like they were based on the Shito-Ryu version. Why does Shotokan have two versions of this kata? I cannot find anyone who knows.

Another interesting thing the list tells me is that Shotokan is not a balance of the Goju and Shorin styles of Okinawa as Funakoshi and others have claimed. Shito-Ryu is, as you can see, it shares kata with both. Shotokan is exclusively Shorin in style and origin with some of Shito-Ryu's "Aragaki Kata" thrown in for good measure (Unsu, Sochin, and Nijushiho).

Ever wonder what the Okinawans were thinking when they named their kata? Imagine working on a kata for an entire year, throwing all of your heart and soul into its creation, and then naming it "24"? That's a little hard to believe, isn't it? But that's exactly what the Okinawans did in most cases. They named many of their kata after the number of steps that the performer takes. For example:

Seisan = 13
Niseishi = 24
Useishi = 54
Seipai = 18
Sanseiryu = 36

Of course, I'm just speculating that the creators of the kata poured mind, body, and soul into their creation. Experience has taught me that our high expectations of famous people are usually higher than those people can reach - much to our disappointment. It's probably more likely that the magnificent kata of the ages were slapped together willy-nilly. It may be that the only reason any of the kata are elegant at all is because so many people have taken part in refining this part and that part. It was an open source movement where everyone has left his mark, and the original work was probably no longer recognizable in the final version.

Whether they were slapped together and refined over time or thoughtfully crafted by the ancient masters, they are, after all is said and done, just strings of basic techniques woven together artfully.

Why are the kata ancient? Why aren't they modern and new? Can't anyone put some basic techniques together using their creative talent and give it a name?

Indeed, anyone can create a kata, but not everyone can create a popular kata. Kata only exist as long as people wish to practice them. If no one likes your kata, then it is doubtful that it will survive much longer than you do. Remember the reasons people enjoy kata? They are good exercise, there is another fighting art hidden inside them, they are artistic and beautiful, and they make us do something that we wouldn't have done before. Those are probably also the reasons that people do not create kata today.

If you create your own kata, it may be artistic and beautiful, but will it have the mystique of the ancient, exotic, and foreign to attract people to it? Will it have hidden applications locked away in secret? Will it be something new and different? Probably not.

Kata created since the 1920's have been rejected by most instructors and associations as "illegitimate." Part of a kata's value to modern karate enthusiasts is its mystique as an ancient thing passed down through the generations from a foreign land with an ancient warrior tradition. When a kata is presented as 1000 years old, people will gasp in awe at the techniques that they don't understand. Perhaps there is some hidden secret, some mystery that we must train harder to understand! When the same kata is revealed as being created by a 12 year old three days ago, the audience that was previously awe inspired and interested will now walk away laughing about the foolishness of children.

It has not always been this way. Today, kata may be rigidly practiced according to the guidelines designed to allow for comparison in competitions, but in the past, it used to be considered a good training tool to have karate students create their own kata. Unfortunately, this aspect of training has been replaced by the discipline of learning kata created in the past. For the last 100 years, the Japanese have left their mark on karate. Their diligent observation of tradition and connection to the past brought karate from creative individual expression to rigid and stoic repetition.

If we are going to create our own kata for others to perform as training tools, the highest levels of expertise and experience in moving will be required. Abandoning the practice of stretching ourselves through the practice of the works of others in favor of creativity too early may not do our training any favors.

On the other hand, waiting until we are in our sixties to begin creating kata is like waiting to win the lottery. Some skill is required to create a kata, but not 30 years of experience, despite what many would like to impose on others in order to protect the status quo.

An example of someone who did not observe this traditional view of things is the late Asai Tetsuhiko, founder of the Japan Karate Shoto-Kai Renmei.

He created the following kata, none of which I am familiar with, and only a few I have seen, unfortunately.

Gyaku zuki no kata
Mawari no kata
Kyakusen-shodan
Shinken
Junro-shodan
Junro-nidan
Junro-sandan
Junro-yondan
Junro-godan
Kihoken-issei
Kihoken-nisei
Kihoken-sansei
Meikyo-nidan
Meikyo-sandan
Jurokupo
Joko-issei
Joko-nisei
Joko-sansei
Hachimon
Senka
Rakuyo
Seiryu
Kakuyoku-shodan
Kakuyoku-nidan
Kakuyoku-sandan
Suishu (Mizu no te)
Kashu (Hi no te)
Roshu (Nami no te)
Hushu (Kaze no te)
Shoto

Nijuhappo
Shotei-dai
Shotei-sho
Rantai
Sensho
Kaminari-arashi
Shinobiyoru-hayabusa
Yokotawaru-tatsu
Hakaishu

Anyone making up their own kata based upon modern training methods will of course base it upon the techniques that are most familiar to them: the punching and kicking style of the tournament fighter of today. It certainly will have no spiritual ties to the past, unless you lie and say it's old or simply modify something that already exists beyond recognition. But with some careful attention to the subtleties of movement in Karate kata of the past, new kata can be forged which are every bit the equal of those we have had passed down to us.

As noted earlier, cowboys don't take things at face value, and they don't leave well enough alone. In the United States, there is a practice of performing kata designed as a dance to pop music. This practice is called musical kata, and while it is not being practiced by Shotokan schools, it is reflective of the general rejection of the Japanese respect for history and tradition on the part of the American population. Just like any nation, Americans have taken karate and made it into what makes sense to them, tossing the old, rigid system out the back door and reengineering it to work with their culture.



The Shotokan Canon

Through some unknown process, the hundred or so kata of Okinawa were filtered until only about 26 kata remained practiced in mainstream Shotokan circles. Probably some of that filtering was due to the fact that Funakoshi did not know all of the more than one hundred kata that existed on Okinawa. That's not surprising. That's too many kata for anyone to be held responsible for. It's also possible that some of the kata he passed along have been dumped by his students because they did not see the value in practicing them. It's also possible that some of them forgot some of what he taught them. Regardless of the process involved, we now only have 26 reliable kata to go by.

So, I decided to make a list of the Shotokan kata so that you could know what all of the kata were that you had to choose from. But in attempting to create this list five years ago, I ran up against a problem: no one seems to agree on how many kata can legitimately be considered of the Shotokan style.

The typical Japanese corporate association Shotokan Canon of kata is basically comprised of twenty six kata. The Shotokai, a more conservative, loosely arranged group of Karate experts in Japan than the non-profit associations, do not endorse all of these kata. Their kata list comes from **Karate-do Kyohan**, Funakoshi's master text on Shotokan Karate, and it only contains fifteen kata.

Fifteen kata or twenty six kata? Which is it? Or is it twenty seven? Or more? Or less?

None of the above.

Funakoshi also created six kata that he called the Taikyoku. They are very simple kata based upon the most basic kata that previous existed. His written intention behind creating them was to make kata that were easy enough for elementary school children to learn. He also created a pseudo-kata intended to aid in the practice of sparring called Ten No Kata. It is debatable whether or not this exercise really qualifies as a kata, but it does

have kata in its name, and it is pre-arranged techniques to be performed in order without a partner.

Most association groups do not generally use the Ten No Kata or the Taikyoku as training exercises.

So, I really don't know what kata to include as part of the Shotokan style. The most liberal thing I could do would be to list everything that is named by an instructor of Shotokan in either system as part of the style. But even that simple solution was thwarted when reading Best Karate by Nakayama, and finding that the author of the largest kata compendium known also named kata such as Seienchin, Hyakuhachiho, and Tensho as also being available to the Shotokan student despite the fact that they are purely Goju-Ryu kata.

Apparently he agreed with what I am going to say on this subject. There is no official list of kata that you find yourself constrained by. Any such boundaries we create in our own minds, as anyone who is expert in Shito-Ryu, Goju-Ryu, or Shotokan ought to be able to witness and learn a kata from either of the other two systems without too much difficulty.

Eventually I decided to list the so-called Twenty Six Kata without the Taikyoku or Ten No Kata included. In my opinion, Ten No Kata is not the most productive thing you can do with your training time. Ten No Kata is just basic technique training, and you'd be better off doing this type of exercise with a partner. If you don't have a partner to train with, I recommend you practice a real kata - not Ten No Kata. The Taikyoku are also without value, in my opinion. Though the Taikyoku may be brain-children of the founder of Shotokan himself, they are overly simple, in my opinion, to serve much value beyond that offered by the Heian kata.

So, even though there are between twenty one and thirty two kata, depending on which of the two big schools of Shotokan you follow, I have followed my own instincts and have listed the 26 kata. That's just my decision, it's not an official number of kata that you should feel limited by. Do what you like. Your karate is your own experience. No one can say without question what the kata of Shotokan are. Athletic associations limit the curriculum of kata in order to limit the scope of the refereeing they have to do at competitions. That is the only reason for the concept of official kata. You may even find yourself later wondering why anyone uses style names at all as you add more and more kata and knowledge to your own experience and find that style definitions are just too confining for advanced practice.

But wait, it gets better! Not only can no one agree on which kata are the official kata, no one can seem to agree on what the kata are named. Funakoshi tried to rename all of the kata from their original Okinawan names to Japanese names. He arrived in Japan during a very nationalistic time when Japan was at war in Manchuria and other parts of China. The Japanese were not into a lot of foreign, exotic sounding things back then, he reasoned, so he tried to take the Okinawa out of karate by renaming everything in the mainland Tokyo dialect.

One might think that devout students of Funakoshi would use the Japanese names he created, since they were obviously too blinded by wartime hatred of all things foreign to accept the Okinawan names. But, it seems that Funakoshi was wrong.

Kenwa Mabuni, the founder of Shito-Ryu, introduced his style to Osaka, Japan a couple of years after Funakoshi introduced Shotokan in Kyoto. Mabuni presented Shito-Ryu as an Okinawan art with full Okinawan names for all of the kata. Shito-Ryu became just as popular as Shotokan despite, or maybe because of, the foreign, exotic aspect. And, Funakoshi's students rejected most of his Japanified names in favor of the original Okinawan names. It seems that Eastern desire to continue the legacy of the forefathers ran stronger in Japan than did any bigotry against Okinawa.

As a result, I have listed below 26 kata with their common names, as listed in ***Best Karate*** and other modern works, on the left. Down the right column, I have listed the Okinawan name that the kata lived under before Funakoshi spent so much energy renaming Karate as well as the kata within it. In most cases, the name on the right is simply the Okinawan pronunciation of the kanji characters that make up the name on the left. Funakoshi usually just encouraged the Japanese to pronounce the characters using the Tokyo accent rather than create a new name for the kata entirely.

Some perceptive people have noted that the more conservative adherents of traditional Shotokan are determined to call Kanku by the name Kwanku in their desire to preserve Funakoshi's name for the kata. However, notice that they do not preserve the name Seisan for Hangetsu, nor do they preserve any of the original names Funakoshi invented. Nor do they attempt to preserve kata that Funakoshi apparently approved of so strongly that he renamed the kata to increase interest in them in Japan. For example: Sochin.

I find that very interesting! Arch-conservatives who practice Shotokan find themselves rejecting kata that their founder obviously wanted them to learn and retain while claiming to practice a reduced list of kata out of respect for the man.

The kata names are only one example of the many pieces of evidence that today's Shotokan has little or nothing to do with the practices of Funakoshi. Funakoshi was famous as the Father of Japanese Karate because he was the first Okinawan to arrive in Japan and begin teaching karate. The commercial nature of the organizations that built themselves in the glow of his halo are suspect as to their motives for naming him as their founder.

It is true that Nakayama and others studied karate under Funakoshi. However, they also studied under his son, who is rumored to have invented many if not most of the methods we have today. His son is also rumored to be the person responsible for importing many of our more popular kata and converting them to the Shotokan method. Unsu and Sochin come to mind.

There really is no such thing as "official" Shotokan kata. There are commonly accepted kata, but you can learn whatever you want, and no one can stop you. No one really has a legitimate claim to the legacy of Funakoshi and his true karate. Nothing that is practiced today is true to Funakoshi's archaic karate methods. The Canon of kata is simply my way of limiting the list of kata that I have to write articles about. Your Canon of Kata is

whatever your instructor tells you to learn for your next test or competition. If you are the instructor yourself, your canon of kata is yours to create and abide by - or disobey with great enjoyment as the case may be.

Name	**Japanese**	**Funakoshi Name**	**Okinawan Name**
Heian	平安	Heian	Pinan
Tekki	鉄騎	Tekki	Naihanchi
Kanku-Dai	観空大	Kosokun, Kwanku	Kushanku
Bassai Dai	抜塞大	Bassai	Oyadomari Passai
Jion	寺音	Jion	Jion
Enpi	燕飛	Wanshu, Enpi	Wanshu
Hangetsu	半月	Seisan, Hangetsu	Seisan
Gankaku	岩鶴	Chinto, Gankaku	Chinto
Jutte	十手	Jutte, Jitte	Jutte, Jitte
Bassai Sho	抜塞小		
Kanku Sho	観空小		
Chinte	珍手		
Sochin	祖鎮	Hakko	Sochin
Unsu	雲手		Unshu, Unsu
Meikyo	明鏡		
Gojushiho Dai	五十四方大	Hotaku	Useishi
Gojushiho Sho	五十四方小	Hotaku	Useishi
Jiin	寺院	Shokyo	Jiin
Wankan	王冠	Shoin, Shofu, Matsukaze	Wankan
Nijushiho	二十四方	Nijushiho	Niseishi



Kata Are Required

It is doubtful that a reputable Shotokan instructor will value your opinions about how best to learn to fight over his own opinions if you are a novice to karate. Questioning the training regimen is comparable to asking a professor of physics "Do I have to learn calculus?" Your instructor will make you learn the kata whether or not you wish to do so. You'll have to bury yourself in them and understand them enough to get by, even if you are not that crazy about kata.

If we instructors didn't force you to learn them, you would never learn whether or not you would have liked them or developed an interest in them later. And besides, who will keep our museum for us after we are gone? Never forget that so many Karate instructors have as their personal goal training students to become a sort of historical preservation society.

Kata are required at every rank test you'll ever take. And, since you must achieve a certain rank before you are allowed to learn to free spar, not learning kata would mean that you will never be allowed to learn the sparring exercises. We instructors have rigged the system against you. You have to learn the kata to get past us to the fun sparring part. Just as in any class at school, you must learn whatever is taught as a whole, then parse out what you wish to retain for your own use later on.

It will take some time if your goal is to learn all of the kata. What do we mean when we say "learn," anyway? Learn to remember them? Recognize them? Or do you want to be able to dazzle with them? Some people never learn all of the kata, while others learn them very rapidly without much difficulty. There are many factors involved. In general, a young, healthy, reasonably athletic person could, with regular and continuous training, be reasonably fluent in all 26 kata within 10 years of his first lesson.

If you started training when you were 8 years old, by the time you are 20, you probably know all of the kata and can perform them all without any difficulty at all. If you start training when you are 30 years old, you might wish to reset your expectations, because

some of those kata may stay out of your reach for a long time. Youth is a great advantage when learning a new skill such as playing a musical instrument or Karate.

How can you tell when you've mastered a kata and should move on? That's up to you. What's your goal for learning them? Allow me to repeat my earlier declaration. Your reasons for doing karate are your own, and you should get out of it what you want, not what someone else says you should. So, do the kata until your goals are reached.

The list below shows several possible layers of fluency in the kata. Maybe there are more.

1. You can remember the movements from beginning to end
2. You can perform the movements from beginning to end without getting stuck
3. You can show some technical skills like rhythm and body dynamics [required for examinations]
4. You can see the punching, blocking, and kicking applications of the movements - the most simple of applications (and the most unlikely)
5. You have a smooth, dynamic kata that is impressive to watch
6. You have mastered the movements in the kata and probably know lots of interesting trivia about it.
7. You have re engineered the kata and can perform complex and possibly impressive applications of the movements

To be considered minimally proficient by most Karate instructors, you probably have to learn the kata as well as the requirement in number three above. If you want to impress me, though, you'd need to ramp up your goals to four or five on the list. But your goal in taking up karate was probably not to impress me, therefore, you should do what you need to do and what you want to do in order to get what you want from your training. Kata practice is a deeply personal experience.

Impressing others with the visual display of grace, coordination, body dynamics, and rhythm is what the performance art of kata is all about. And, most karate associations have a pretty rigid concept about whose eye will do the beholding and what the definition of beauty is.

Not only do you have to remember the kata and be pretty while doing it, With the release of the ***Best Karate*** series of books by Nakayama, the Shotokan world became entranced with the idea that kata must start and finish in the same spot. Whether or not you are able to finish a kata on the same spot as the one you started on has even become one of the factors in determining the value of a performance. With the advent of competitions, being able to place the finish in the exact, correct spot was made an important feature of kata performance. Nakayama's books were intended to re-release many of the Shotokan kata so that they would finish where they began.

Nakayama didn't do that great of a job at making all of the kata finish where they begin.

Some of the kata still don't finish at the point at which they begin. Jiin, for example, ends 3 feet to the left of where you started. Jutte also does not finish in the same place, nor does Enpi or Heian 4. Worrying about finishing where you began is probably the last thing that you should be concerned with. While trying to finish on the same spot can provide some feedback as to how well you follow the performance line of a particular kata, it is not definitive. Don't waste a lot of time on it. Especially don't waste a lot of time trying to finish Nijushiho on the same spot. It doesn't work!

Kata practice has become a mandatory performance of basic techniques that is judged purely on style in most places. Some people are lucky and train with Elmar Schmeisser, and they get to learn all kinds of nifty applications for their kata. Many have recently abandoned the sparring path of karate and have started to practice the "other art" that exists at the end of the kata path. Either way, you'll get a lot out of kata training if you avoid setting your expectations too low or too high.



Kata Specialization

Contrary to popular opinion, karate does not require a lifetime to master for everyone. Everyone is different, and some people are naturally more talented than others.

Some people are particularly quick studies at kata and have a natural ability to remember and perform many kata equally well. Such a person might eventually become bored with the 26 kata of Shotokan after having specialized in each of them long enough to fully understand them. With the limits of the Shotokan Kata Canon explored, some turn introspective and begin unraveling applications from the kata they know to revitalize their interest. Others turn to any of the 100 or more kata that are not part of the Shotokan Canon and learn new and different ways of performing kata.

Very few people have the necessary inborn talent to learn all 26 of the kata and perform them all equally well. Most people are challenged by kata as a performance art, and so they instead try to limit the scope of their efforts to only a few kata. With all of those kata to choose from, Shotokan makes it a little easier on you by limiting the study of kata to only 26 different ones. Most instructors do not know all of them. Instead, they've chosen to specialize in only a couple of kata and practice a few of the others enough to remember the movements and the rhythm.

For most people, learning that first kata is usually quite a challenge. Learning to think in three dimensions about where you are going together with the confusion of having to remember not only which techniques to do, but also all of the twenty or so variables that go into each movement, even a simple kata becomes a challenge.

But as the students who continue their training for years eventually discover, those big kata like Kanku-Dai that stare down on you imposingly are possible to conquer. As the student gains experience, the mind no longer must monitor every little detail because it groups several actions into one thought, and, over time, several thought types into one thought combination. The human mind chunks single moves into groups of moves, and finally sees patterns and organization where before only chaos was visible. Experts

become able to do more than remember Kanku-Dai. They are able to perform it properly on "auto-pilot" without paying attention to their actions. This allows the expert to focus on technical precision by paying attention to only one detail at a time while the others are maintained through habit formed by long years of training.

As the karate enthusiast amasses hours and hours of training in karate, learning a new kata is less and less challenging for him. In a strange turn of irony, the typical karate enthusiast can learn the last 13 kata in the same amount of time that it took him to learn the first five. Learning that last kata takes perhaps an hour, and becoming reasonable proficient – just a couple of months!

Unfortunately, most people aren't able to ever reach that combination of skill and native talent that allows them to hold 26 kata in memory with minimal attention. Most people must practice every kata they wish to remember constantly in order to retain their knowledge of it. Most of us cannot progress with any one kata if we are busy doing all 26 of the kata every time we train. Some solve this puzzle by limiting the number of kata that they ever learn. Others learn the Japanese concept of tokui: specialization. They choose tokui kata, perhaps one or two, and they focus on them to the exclusion of the others.

As you begin moving away from the Heian, your best bet is to focus on just a couple of



The kanji for "tokui", which means specialty or forte.

kata, or maybe only one, for an extensive period of time. Doing so enables you to deeply explore every nook and cranny of its techniques, and it prevents you from getting confused as to which kata you were doing just a second ago. "Hey, wait a minute! I started doing Kanku-Dai? Why am I doing Heian Nidan now? Rats!" Specialization helps burn the kata in permanently so that you will remember it even years after you have not performed it.

Tokui is a word that means "specialty" or "forte" in Japanese. When you pull out your tokui kata and perform it, it is supposed to be a kata with which you have particular skill.

If you are a 3rd kyu, you don't have a tokui kata. You probably don't have enough experience to have a tokui anything. Just do what you are told. But those of you out there with black belts around your waists, you should be working on a specialty kata all of your own. This will be the first kata that you stop becoming and start making into you.



The kanji for "shitei", which means "assigned."

The other kata are considered **shitei** kata by the expert. Shitei kata are those compulsory kata that must be learned, but are not favored by the expert as of particular interest. Shitei means "assignment." Shitei and tokui are usually used to indicate the requirements on examinations for rank certification. The Shitei kata will be those you are expected to understand and be able to perform on demand. The tokui section is comprised of your choice of a kata to perform.

The same is true in competitions. You perform your required kata on demand, proving that you have done your duty to tradition, history, and the legacy of past instructors with honor and all of that nonsense. After that, you can perform the kata that you actually like and are interested in - your specialization.

Do not listen to those who tell you that your specialization must be in a kata that fits your body type. Some people have the silly notion stuck in their heads that fat people should do the slow-paced kata and that tall people should do kata like Kanku-Dai. They also say that short, fast people should do kata like Enpi. I think that is preposterous.

Kata may have a heavy, light, or fast feeling about them, but that doesn't mean that the kata is best performed by someone who moves like that, nor does it mean that choosing to specialize in a kata like that is good for you. All of the kata are best performed by someone with a pretty body who is athletic. It doesn't matter what kata it is, the same, beautiful body is best for performing every single kata. The kata champions of the world will look great doing any kata - Jutte or Enpi.

Those of us with less than perfect bodies should probably not waste a lot of energy trying to pick a specialty kata that matches our body type, since no matter what kata we pick, we will not look as good as the pretty people do when they do it - even if it is not their specialty. Rather than waste effort on worrying about picking a kata that is suited to your body, you should instead pick a kata that will teach you something you want to learn. Choose a kata that will turn one of your major weaknesses into a minor weakness, or convert one of your strengths into a major strength. You probably didn't sign up for karate so that you would be unhappy all the time, so you might consider picking a kata that makes you happy and forget the concerns others have for your development.

Kata specialization is a great tool to limit the scope of your project to develop your karate skills. At first you will know only a few kata, and you will easily keep all of them in check while you learn more. As you advance, the suitcase you keep your kata in will become too heavy, and you'll have to set the ones you are not using aside. Doing so will build your self-esteem as you will find yourself able to more quickly come to grips with your chosen challenge.

Begin as a generalist, become a specialist, and through experience become yet again a generalist.



The Myth of Shorin and Shorei Kata

In his book ***Ryukyu Karate Kenpo***, Funakoshi asserts that kata are of two styles: Shorin and Shorei. Funakoshi claimed that light and fast kata are Shorin style, and that heavy and slow kata are Shorei style. So, using his logic, Hangetsu and Sochin would be Shorei style kata, while Enpi and Kanku would be Shorin style. Funakoshi also associated the Shorin style with Shuri City while he associated Shorei karate with Naha City's methods.

Shorin means “Pine Forest,” and there are three styles of Shorin-Ryu on Okinawa which are closely related to the Karate Funakoshi learned during his childhood. The three styles are Matsubayashi-Ryu, Kobayashi-Ryu, and Shobayashi-Ryu. Shorin is written the same as “Shao Lin” in Chinese, giving rise to a belief that this sort of Karate method is related to the Gongfu of the famous Chinese temple.

I doubt there is much if any relationship at all to the Chinese temple.

I've listened to untold numbers of instructors give that old lecture about how some kata are Shorin and others are Shorei style. Usually, the lecture goes something like this, "Shorin kata are to be performed quickly, while Shorei kata are to be performed slowly and powerfully. Small, thin people should do Shorin, and fat or muscular people should do Shorei kata."

Rubbish.

Not only is it incorrect to assume that any kata looks better when an obese person is doing it, it is also wrong to continue to teach and spread the mythology that there are Shorin and Shorei kata that can be identified in Shotokan's canon. Perhaps knocking the Shorin/Shorei brick loose in everyone's minds will aid my pursuit of one of my personal Holy Grails: to convince instructors to stop depressing everyone with bad news about how their body type should affect their choice of kata to practice.

The chart below shows Funakoshi's classifications of the kata listed in his first work on karate, and it also shows the probable origin of that kata. The data in the chart come from Funakoshi's claim of the kata being either Shorin style or Shorei style in his book. The third column of data, the place of origin, is matched up by looking at modern Okinawan karate styles and their accepted canon of kata. I used several references for this information, including Higashionna's books on Okinawan Goju-Ryu. Note that the likely source of the kata is listed to the right of that column, showing the disparity between Funakoshi's Shorin-Shorei divisions and the actual style that the kata is from.

Kata Name	**Shorin / Shorei**	**Source System**
Heian (5)	Shorin	Shorin-Ryu
Tekki (3)	Shorei	Shorin-Ryu
Kanku Dai	Shorin	Shorin-Ryu
Bassai Dai	Shorin	Shorin-Ryu
Jion	Shorei	Shorin-Ryu
Enpi	Shorei	Shorin-Ryu
Hangetsu	Shorei	Shorin-Ryu
Gankaku	Shorin	Shorin-Ryu
Jutte	Shorin	Shorin-Ryu

Funakoshi Shorin/Shorei vs. Place of Kata Origin

The table above shows where I think these kata came from. When I look in Google Earth at the island of Okinawa, I can see that Naha, Shuri, and Tomari sit within a couple of miles of each other. Tomari is basically a suburb of Naha that is lost in a sea of buildings between Naha harbor and Shuri Castle. In fact, while the residents of that area of town would probably scream if they read this, Tomari is really sort of a moot point, despite it being credited with a style of Okinawan Karate.

In reality, there are two major styles that I can see looking at Goju-Ryu and Shorin-Ryu. I see one style, Shorin-Ryu, which is older and uses more simplistic and large motions which hit Okinawa first. Then there is the Goju style, which is younger and arrived on Okinawa later. Some might even say it is a little more sophisticated than Shorin-Ryu in some regards.

Considering the Shotokan kata from this perspective, there is no logic behind the classifications of Shorin and Shorei in Funakoshi's book. He classifies Jiin, Jutte, and Jion as different styles, but the opening and closing postures identify these kata as being developed together. They all contain the same style of movement. None of them have any of the hallmarks of Goju kata. And, anyone who has practiced all three of these kata realizes that they are all different versions of the same kata. Jion, Jiin, and Jutte are the same kata performed three different ways. How can they be from different styles?

Enpi and Bassai are also linked by this same opening hand-in-fist posture; it's just been moved around over time to different elbow positions. These kata were very popular on Okinawa, and so instead of thinking they come from a city, they come from several different people. There are at least four different versions of Bassai that I have found. Tomari Bassai, Oyadomari Bassai, Ishimine Bassai, and Matsumura Bassai. These are all different perspectives on the same kata. They were each refined by a different Okinawan or created by using the original as a basis.

These aren't Shorei or Shorin kata. These are just kata that come to us from individuals on Okinawa.

This is where the Japanese tendency to use style names, boundaries, borders, and rigid, dogmatic thinking fail them. If we try really hard, we can imagine all sorts of boxes and pigeon holes for our kata to fit into tidily that help us to understand which ones are "OK" and which ones are "not OK."

But this black and white thinking is not an accurate view, in my opinion, of what the history of kata is. When we read Cook, we see that Karate on Okinawa was an individualist pursuit, and that each expert took what he learned, toyed with it at will, and made it his own. Then his student did the same, so that the two men might both practice Bassai, but neither one did it the same way. In fact, in many cases, the student would totally overhaul his Bassai and add his new kata to the huge number being traded around Okinawa like baseball cards.

It's pretty clear from this chart that Shotokan, if intended as a blend of the three major styles on Okinawa, is not. It's a Shorin/Shuri City methodology almost exclusively. None of the kata above originated in Naha City as far as anyone can tell. Even Hangetsu, which has a distant relative in the Goju System called Seisan, actually comes from a Shuri kata that looks just like Hangetsu that is also called Seisan. The Shuri kata is probably the older of the two, and the Goju kata is a newer version imported all over again from China.

How far back should we reach in order to determine what style a kata belongs to? Shall we make a single classification called White Crane Kung Fu and put all of the kata into that style that don't go into the Okinawan Folk Dance category?

There are no Naha kata in Shotokan's 15 kata Canon. The Goju system is not represented among the kata Funakoshi recommended we practice - the supposed balance of all different styles of karate is not there. It turns out it was little more than marketing on Funakoshi's part. I suppose he did this to make his Karate seem superior because it was "a blend of the best styles."

Have we not read that elsewhere these days?

Shito-Ryu, another Japanese style founded by one of Funakoshi's contemporaries, contains the kata of both systems, making Shito-Ryu an actual attempt at a combination of both the Shorin and Goju styles of Okinawa.

Where did Funakoshi get this classification of Shorei and Shorin? I can't imagine. When I look at his list of kata above, I don't see a particular pattern related to the movements, the rhythm, nor the origins of the kata.

Some people might start pointing at the more advanced kata list for some Naha City kata. Unsu and Nijushiho are all taken from Shito-Ryu - presumably by Funakoshi's son Yoshitaka. According to Mabuni Kenzo, his father learned Unshu, Sochin, and Niseishi from Higaonna. His brother, Mabuni Kenei, claims that the Shito-Ryu founder learned these three kata from Arakaki Seisho. Goju folks don't do these kata. The Shotokan versions of these kata are unique to us. Probably Funakoshi's son created them from the Shito kata he learned.

Thus, I come back to the point I try to make in this text again and again, annoying to the reader it may be. Kata were being created like crazy on Okinawa by everyone who learned Karate. Then it arrived in Japan, the War happened, and since then, kata creation has been abandoned in favor of stagnation as a meditative state.



Kata Names

One evening while sitting in a restaurant in Nagoya philosophizing with my instructor, we discussed the kanji used in the names of the kata and the meaning of the names of the kata. He said, "One day someone should study the kata from a bibliographical perspective. Maybe you can do that when you go back home."

The topic came up because we were talking about how strange it is that most Japanese don't know what their own names mean, despite the obvious use of kanji and the self-evident meanings. For example, Tanaka is composed of two kanji: Ta, which means rice paddy, and naka, which means middle of. Tanaka obviously means the middle of the rice paddy. It's probably a name given to a rice farmer. No expatriate living in Japan can explain it, but we all discuss and laugh about the fact that we never met a Japanese who was not utterly shocked to learn their last name has a meaning. Perhaps only descendants of the Roman Empire have the tendency to question something as trivial as the meaning of someone's name.

When I returned to the US, I experimented with publishing on the Internet, and one of my first projects was to translate, as best I could, the names of all of the Shotokan kata.

Some of the karate books on my shelves contain translations for the names of the kata. For example, Nakayama, or more accurately, the translator that works for Kodansha International, translated the name of Bassai Dai as "To Penetrate a Fortress" in *Best Karate* Volume 6. However, other kata names, like Jion, he left un-translated. Other books follow the same pattern. The books translate some kata names, but not others, and the translations don't seem to be correct when you check them with a dictionary.

Even though many famous and respected works on karate present translations of the names of the kata, when I started attempting to translate the kata names on my own, I was surprised at just how wrong some of the translations are. Most works in English that

contain translations of the kata names are written by authors who either do not read Japanese or who lack the courage to present information that is contrary to the work of famous instructors from Japan. Some Japanese authors simply don't have very good English. As a result, some of the common interpretations of the names of the kata we have all come to accept as givens are completely invalid.

Who am I to question this stuff? I'm someone with a stack of Japanese dictionaries and Shotokan Karate books who went to school for three years practicing Japanese every day before living in Japan for an additional two years. During my stay, I spoke, read, wrote, and listened to almost nothing but Japanese all day long.

Because my translations disagree with some of the published authorities of karate, such as Nakayama, I've been accused of trying to teach the Japanese how their own language works. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Translating is best done by someone working with a foreign language working to put it into their own native language. As any translator will tell you, good translating is a pull action, not a push activity.

The worst translations, such as some Japanese-authored martial arts books, are usually the result of someone trying to translate from their native tongue into a foreign language. Since this method is notorious for producing poor reading, usually such translators are followed by native speakers who attempt to clean up the translation so that it sounds more natural. However, this is not really an acceptable substitute for pulling from the foreign language into your own. The native speaker should be the one doing the translating into their own lingo.

For over eleven years, I have asked for anyone who can to contradict my translations citing published dictionaries or standard kanji numbers that I can use to verify the validity of the claim. So far, my translations seem to stand up to scrutiny.

So, what does the name of a kata mean? No one really knows for sure, since the Okinawans and Japanese who named them are all dead, and most of the names were created out of thin air. While the name "McCary" may be thought to mean "Son of the Dark One," it must have evolved from whatever word it was originally into the name we know today. Names are hard to validate after the people who thought them up have been dead for 500 years. Just like a person's name, the kata names are usually not real Japanese words that any Japanese would recognize. What does Richard mean? Do you know? I don't. Most Japanese wouldn't know what Bassai or Kanku means, either.

Some of the kata names come from the names of famous places in Japan, China, and Okinawa. Jion is one such name. Jion is a common name for Buddhist temples in Japan. Bassai is thought to have probably been the name of an Okinawan or Chinese named Passai. Sochin is probably invented. Show any of these words to a Japanese, and unless they are interested in karate, they will have no idea what the words mean. They will do what I did: Look at the kanji in the word, try to understand each, and then try to understand what the kanji mean in combination with each other.

Some of the names have some sort of reference to the movements of the kata. For example, Unsu means "Cloud+Hand(s)." There are two times in the kata that one

performs the "Spreading Clouds Block." Obviously, this kata was named for this movement.

I went out and looked up every character in every possible writing of every possible name for the accepted 26 style Shotokan Karate kata that I could find. I took several logical steps. First, I tried to find as many different kanji characters as I could that were used in various works to write the names of the kata. I translated them all without picking a best choice. The sources for the kanji I used were:

- Funakoshi, Gichin. ***Ryukyu Karate Kenpo***, 1922. (Japanese).
- Kanazawa, Hirokazu. ***All Kata of Shotokan***, 1981 (Japanese sections).
- Sugiyama, Shojiro. ***25 Shotokan Kata***, 1989 (Japanese sections).
- A list of kata in Japanese from the dojo where I trained in Nagoya, Japan written by my instructor, Katayama Hitoshi.

After getting the name of the kata in written Japanese, I then proceeded to translate each and every character of every possible combination that I was able to find. I took the characters and tried to find them in dictionaries as whole words where possible, but usually there were none. There is no such word as Bassai. Once I gave up finding whole words, I built many different potential meanings out of the combination of the two characters as independent entities, and I had a couple of Japanese friends of mine review my work.

In the articles about each of the kata I have presented my translations of the kata's name. I have interpreted them using the kanji in the name, and the meanings of those kanji to guess at what the creators might have intended. In some cases, I have taken into consideration the Japanese tendency to transpose kanji that are homonyms when they don't know which one is appropriate. I have also considered the possibility that some of the kata names are meaningless in Japanese due to being Okinawan or even Chinese words which, much like my last name, “Redmond,” no longer mean anything to anyone alive.



Kata Names

When I am practicing a kata, I feel a nearly spiritual connection to the past. There is nothing scientific about this feeling. It's the same sort of emotion you experience when you acquire a rare antique. Think of all of the places that the antique has been, and all of the people who have owned it before. Performing a kata can bring that same satisfying feeling of being firmly rooted in the past.

Many times I have wondered what the men who created the kata were thinking. When Yoshitaka Funakoshi was working to invent Sochin for Shotokan, what was he thinking? What made him choose the techniques that he did, and why didn't he just leave the kata the way it was originally in Shito-Ryu? Knowing what the creator was thinking at the time might reveal some hidden secret. On the other hand, imagine everyone's disappointment to find a book by Yoshitaka in which he wrote in his journal that he was just trying to make a pretty dance!

Do you ever wonder what the man who created Gankaku was thinking when he created it? Or what about the man who added the three hops at the end of Chinte? What in the world was he thinking? I mean, really, what was that guy thinking? The sad truth is we have no idea. We can't be certain who created any of the kata, nor do we have any idea what the creator of the kata intended to do with it.

Some misguided fools think that the applications they were taught for their kata are the correct ones. There is no book you can read that contains citations of ancient texts about karate kata and their meaning. There are no ancient texts. Instead, Okinawans and Japanese have relied heavily on oral history to pass along the history of karate and the meaning of the kata. While oral traditions are terribly romantic, they aren't very reliable. Japanese or Okinawans being questioned about history can make it up as they go along while we are none the wiser.

Shotokan's most senior instructors admit that they are in the dark when it comes to the meaning behind the kata techniques. One famous instructor of Shotokan from Japan

admits in his book on Karate training that many of the kata techniques are not useful except in terms of exercise. It's a little disturbing when one of the highest ranked Karate experts on the planet confesses that he doesn't know any applications for some of the techniques he's been doing for more than 40 years.

This situation exists because the students of Funakoshi learned the kata as solo technical training - almost a sort of dance routine for exercise, balance, and endurance. To these men, kata are performance art. Funakoshi did not come from Okinawa with a plethora of applications for the kata techniques. He came from Okinawa with a lot of memorized routines which he taught to his students.



The kanji above are for the word Oyo, which means "practical use." Oyo is the best term to use in Japanese when referring to kata applications.

Kata are beautiful and yet hollow in the Shotokan style, just like the castle with pretty lines that has nothing inside of it but a photograph of the original building in flames.

No one who studies kata applications should claim to know the original intent of the creator of that kata. The original intent is lost forever.

Because we will never know the original intentions of the creators of most of the kata, we instead analyze the kata and attempt to decipher what the techniques could be used for, even if the creator of the kata never intended the techniques to be useful. This process of starting at the finish and working your way backward to find the meaning of a technique is called reverse engineering. Because all kata applications, no matter who is teaching them to you, are reverse engineered, there is no best application for any technique in a kata.

Since all currently practiced kata applications are inventions of the modern era, none can be considered the original teaching or intent of a kata. The most simple of the applications are valid because of their direct approach using blocking and punching. The most complex applications containing joint locking are equally valid. How can there be a best way? Is it better to simply walk up to your opponent and try to hit him with a

technique that requires medium to long distance, level ground, and only gives you one chance? Or is it better to have a huge array of less damaging techniques to choose from, each less likely to succeed but better designed for disaster recovery? Only you can answer that question for yourself.



Bunkai is a word that means "to take apart" or "to break down." Literally, it means "to analyze" when used as a verb. Applications are but one way to analyze a kata, so this word is a little vague and probably not as clear as Oyo.

Shotokan Karate offers no answers to that question. The Shotokan combative style is that of the single, simple, over-developed punch or kick. Yet the kata present that other art that we are no longer taught and do not practice.



Dr. Schmeisser

If you have been training more than a decade, you have probably begun to wonder what secrets the kata may hold, and what secrets the kata could be made to hold, were you to analyze them for application use.

Once you are tired of the more obvious block and punch kata applications, you begin trying to unravel more complex applications. In order to do this, you'll need a little joint lock training in something like Jujutsu or Aikido. But, how will you know if your application has any merit? You showed the application to your instructor, but he just shook his head in disgust and told you to get back in line and do what he says. In that case, you can use Schmeisser's Rules to help you determine if your applications are bunkai or just plain bunk.

Dr. Elmar Schmeisser, a research scientist who studies vision, the eyes, and theoretical constructs involving sight, has put together a list of rules that anyone can follow to help them determine what the kata they are doing might mean. Dr. Schmeisser doesn't suggest that his rules are definitely those used historically. As a scientist, he realizes the dubious nature of claiming to understand the original intent of the creators of the kata.

However, he does suggest that perhaps he has found rules which help us to make sense of the kata and dig through them for possible applications. Whether or not he's found the original rules used by the creators for constructing the kata? We'll never know. But, the rules he's come up with are absolutely brilliant for our own reverse-engineering efforts. Dr. Schmeisser explained these rules to me, and I wrote them down. They are his mind at work combined with my typing. The only genius I contributed to creating these rules was being smart enough to write them down before anyone else did.

Schmeisser's Rules

1. Don't be bound by Label Disease. Just because the technique is officially called a down block, doesn't mean you can't use it as a parry or punch combination followed by a grab and a groin strike.

2. Everything you do causes some damage or severe pain to your opponent.

3. Slow movements mean “This is difficult.” Pay attention to this technique because it will be very difficult to pull off in the real world.

4. When a technique or a series of techniques are repeated it means "This is important." Note: performing the same set of techniques twice or three times may also not be a true repetition but a true sequence that looks like it but which is better explained as a connected series of different moves.

5. Any jumping techniques really mean that your opponent flies through the air after being thrown. You are not jumping over a stick. No one will ever, nor have they ever, attacked anyone's ankles with a 6 foot long stick you can jump over.

6. Crossing the feet generally shows pivoting in place rather than the horizontal action that it appears as in the kata. Add a corner there, and change the performance line.

7. Always, always, always consider the move(s) before and after what you're looking at. Do not think in blocks of techniques that are obvious. Step backward one technique or forward one technique to understand the current one.

8. Never, ever let go of the opponent unless it's definitely "over". He might kill you if you let go of him after hurting him badly.

9. There are no blocks in kata. There are no defensive movements, only counteroffensive ones, and the follow ups are in the kata sequence in the appropriate order.

10. Damage escalates in each sequence of techniques. Usually the last technique is the nastiest.

11. There is no single, original intent behind any technique. Think freely. Brainstorm.

Using this methodology, Elmar Schmeisser has pioneered some interesting kata applications. For example, the first down block followed by a stepping punch in Heian Shodan can be reverse engineered into a dangerous and violent sequence. The first action, folding the arms before you step outward to block, is actually the blocking action: a nagashi-uke using your fist with the top hand, a punch to your chosen target on the opponent with the other hand. The top hand is a fist, so while you are blocking, you also punch into a sensitive spot surgically creating pain in the forearm and stunning your opponent for the next move. All of this happens before you even throw the downward block action.

Next, grab the opponent under the elbow of the arm that you struck with your parrying action with your right hand. Step into him, and strike as with a downward block into his testicles. Reach behind your opponent as you step in, grab his belt at the small of his back, and punch into his throat hard, crushing the trachea and toppling him over the grabbing hand in the back. All of this is the first two techniques in Heian 1.

So, forget what you've learned about applications. You should especially forget the horrible applications demonstrations that are photographed in most kata texts. The sequences showing some famous guy turning in different directions blocking this punch and blocking that kick and then turning again are products of applications incompetence. Rather than thinking of a kata as a large fight scene with a bunch of opponents, try to think of your kata as a flow chart.

For example, the first five techniques of Heian Shodan are alternatives to each other, not linear steps within a fight. The first two techniques are one possibility; the next three techniques are another possibility. The turning action adds yet another possibility for ending the first alternative or beginning the second alternative.

Rather than being scripted fights with four opponents, kata are sets of combinations and alternative combinations to each other that are arranged together, but are not necessarily usable as a whole kata. The reason that they are all in a whole kata is because they are all squished together so that you can practice them more easily. They're compressed. And, because the kata applications are explained in other kata and in other sections of the same kata, they are encrypted.

Don't stand in the middle of four guys and block their punches and then punch them back, turn and repeat. That's insane. Instead, using Schmeisser's Rules and the concept of Flow Charting, you should be able to find tons of valuable combinations and defenses against almost any sort of attack.

Dr. Schmeisser



The Kata Database

I was introduced to the world of relational databases quite by accident. While working a stint in a telecom company, I found myself assigned to the Information Technology department doing work with a huge database. The job required that I learn how databases work and relational database theory. Suddenly, one day, a thought burst into my head, "The kata are a database!" It may not sound very fantastic if you think of a database as only a bunch of names and addresses. However, once you understand the importance of the relational database to information management, you will understand just how much the kata resemble the relational database model. Understanding this will shed new light on your understanding of kata, and where they fit into your training regimen.

Tables - If you have used Microsoft Excel, you are already familiar with databases to an extent. Databases are giant warehouses of information. The information is arranged into what are called tables. A database table consists of rows and columns of data. For example, if you make columns called name and phone_number, and then rows numbered 1-3 with your friend's names and phone numbers listed out on each row, you have created a table. A set of tables is a database. Sometimes a database is just a single, giant table.

Relations - Also important to the concept of kata as a database is the idea of relations. A relation is a column in a table that ties that table's information to another table. For example, you could create a second list with your friend's names and addresses. The names would be the same as in the name column of your phone number list, and therefore the tables would be related to one another. You could see that the name, phone number, and address are all for the same person. Any column that points to a column in another table is called a **foreign key**.

Lookup Tables - Just to make sure we have everything covered, also consider the importance of being able to normalize your database. Normalizing information happens when you take a column that only has a few values that repeat and you pull it out of the table, placing that information into a separate table of its own. For example, let's say you

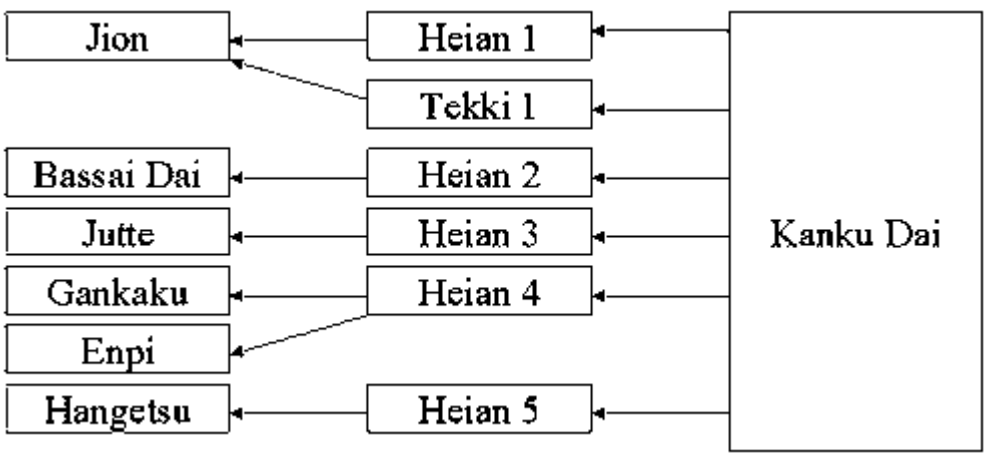
have a list of cities and states. You would be wasting space on your hard drive if you had the full name of each state in a column next to the city name. All of those state names are repeating, and there are only fifty of them. So, instead, in that column you place numbers from 1 to 50, each one representing a state. That saves a lot of space. To find the state name, you lookup the information from another table that has a list of numbers from 1-50 and the names of each state in it. You get the information when you need it, but you don't have to repeat it over and over.

Parent Tables - The parent tables in a database are the top level tables that actually contain the bulk of the data that the database contains. All of the other tables tie to each other, eventually leading to this one roof table or parent table - the master table.

Huh?

The point is that kata are tables. Each kata is a table containing information. That information is generally considered by karate experts to be local to the kata, however, I happened to notice one day that the kata are related to each other. For example, the first half of Heian Nidan contains the same techniques as the first 20% or so of Kanku Dai. Obviously they are related. Heian Nidan points to this spot in Kanku Dai. The four-finger penetrating hand in Heian Nidan could point to two places in Kanku Dai. Furthermore, the other Heian kata point to Kanku Dai and other kata simultaneously - making the Heian kata a kind of lookup table that helps to join the Kanku Dai, the defining kata for Shotokan Karate, to other kata that are also part of the Shotokan database.

What is the most important kata in Shotokan Karate? The most important kata



by far is Kanku Dai. There are several reasons for this. Kanku Dai is the **Roof Kata** or **Parent Kata** for the entire Shotokan database of kata. All of the kata are pointed to from various portions of Kanku Dai, and the Heian and Tekki kata index the various portions of Kanku Dai, expanding them with more detail and making the kata easier to learn. Other karate styles have different roof kata, like Suparinpei for Goju Ryu, which support the training methods and tactics of that style of karate.

How do the Heian act as lookup tables?
The Heian can be positioned between Kanku Dai and the other major kata of the

Shotokan system. The major kata of Shotokan are Kanku Dai (parent), Bassai Dai, Jion, Enpi, Jutte, Hangetsu, and Gankaku. Essentially what the Heian do is tie the kata together in a giant spider web of knowledge.

For example, where Heian 2 and Bassai-Dai join is on the reverse inside blocks. Kanku Dai joins to Heian 2 on the sword hand blocks and the spear hand strike. The spear hand strikes in Kanku Dai are expanded in Heian Nidan to show additional possible continuations. The inside reverse blocks are also expanded in Heian 2 to show more possibilities for those techniques.

Kata That Don't Fit In
Every expert who has mastered most of the kata for the Shotokan system has noticed that some kata, while interesting and unique, do not fit into the Shotokan database. Unsu, Sochin, Nijushiho, Gojushiho-Sho and Dai, and some others do not have logical places to sit inside the Shotokan database. However, they have been inserted into our system by past experts, and retained because of entertainment value and practicality.

Unsu originally had little in common with the Shotokan system of karate. However, it has been modified to tie into the system. The very last techniques, the upper rising block and reverse punch combination, can be connected to Jion. Sochin can be tied directly to Kanku Dai via the side snapping kicks and the sword hand blocks. Nijushiho ties very weakly to the movements in Unsu, which then tie back to Jion.

Other Karate Styles
So what makes the Goju system or the Shito system of karate totally different from Shotokan Karate? The parent kata of the system. Whichever kata those system may have in their databases that are considered the very center, the ultimate reflection of their methodology and techniques - those kata define the system. For Shotokan it is Kanku Dai. Goju ryu has Sanchin or Suparinpei to serve as a parent kata. Shito-Ryu is basically a combination of Shorin and Goju, and thus contains both of these system's databases. The ways that their kata interrelate with each other, and with Shotokan kata, could tell us more about our own kata by revealing applications for techniques that have vanished from some of our own forms.

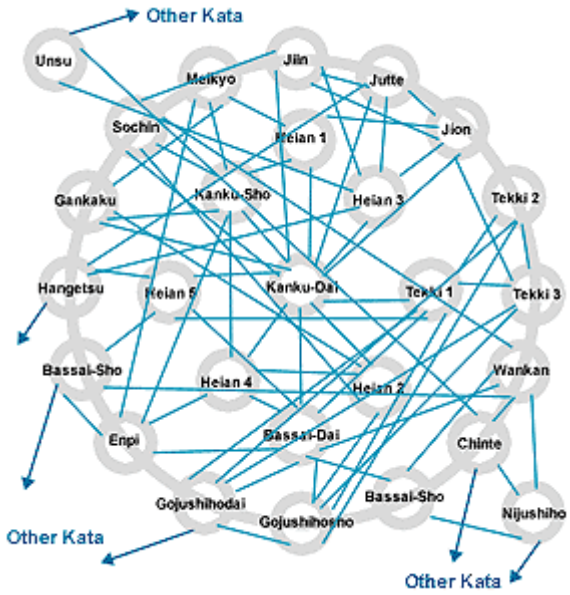
The Master Kata
Which kata is the kata that ties Kanku Dai to the parent kata of the other styles? Whichever it is, it contains hints and keys for movements for all of the styles, including Shotokan, and could be used by a very advanced practitioner to cross from Shotokan over to a sort of "all karate of Okinawa" type of study. The Master Kata would contain relations to kata in all styles at the top-most level. Unfortunately, the Master Kata may no longer exist. It may have dropped out of existence some time ago, all because it was not entertaining and the people of a particular time might not have found it interesting enough to pass it on.

Passing kata on and preserving them requires a certain kind of person who is interested in historical preservation and continuing things along without much change. This does not describe everyone's personality, and it is unfair to expect every student of Karate to specifically learn Karate and adhere to a set curriculum that they are held responsible for passing down.

When people unsuited to this have become bottlenecked in the “family tree” that kata have passed through, kata disappear forever. When someone suited to this task is in place, all of the kata might pass to the next generation.

Why are some kata falling into disuse?

Some kata seem to be remembered by fewer and fewer people as time passes. The effect is noticeable even since the 1980's. Why is this happening? Karate has transformed almost completely into a sport. Most of the focus for kata enthusiasts is on the aspect of performance and aesthetics. Very few kata experts and specialists are interested in the history or the applications of the techniques within the kata that they perform.



Instead, most everyone focuses on how slowly and dramatically a block can be here, or how quickly and precisely two punches can be executed there. Jump high, duck quickly, use a very dynamic and entertaining rhythm. These are the concerns of the modern kata expert. Because of this, the more aesthetic and entertaining kata have become very commonly practiced, while others are sliding into obscurity. For example, Sochin and Unsu are regularly practiced these days. Unsu obviously for the 4 quick punches and the dramatic leaping action has been chosen as a tournament favorite. Sochin's powerful and dramatic two handed "Incomparable Posture" is truly that, and the kata has become a staple of every advanced karate enthusiast's performance choices.

Other kata, which are not very well engineered for dancing in recitals, have become unloved, bastard children of the kata of Shotokan. Wankan, which is too short, contains no impressive techniques, and is quickly mastered by experts, is becoming more and more obscure. The fact that it and Jiin were not listed in ***Best Karate*** by Nakayama sounded the eventual death knell of these two kata. Meikyo is another kata that not too many Shotokan enthusiasts can pull out of their hats on demand.

Another reason that kata have begun to fall into disuse is the continuing increase of emphasis on basic techniques and sparring that have crept into karate practice around the world. Originally Okinawan karate is rumored to have consisted of almost nothing but kata practice. As a novice began his training, he immediately began to learn what we now consider to be an intermediate kata. There were of course the makiwara and other auxiliary exercises, but the kata were the core of the training for Okinawans, as far as anyone can tell from the stories told today.

As modern exercise physiology developed, the Shotokan enthusiasts in colleges and universities around Japan climbed on board. They began to develop karate training less complicated and more militaristic. They also tried to engineer exercise that would

facilitate Karate experts getting more results faster than had previously been possible. In order to facilitate the large numbers of future soldiers that were training with him, Funakoshi abandoned his practice of teaching Heian Shodan for an extended period, and began teaching techniques and sparring drills instead. This put kata out of the center of karate training.

Obviously, when kata were the core of karate training, maintaining a great many kata made a lot of sense. As time went by, and as more and more young men knocked on Funakoshi's door looking for instruction before they joined the Army, Funakoshi changed the focus to techniques and sparring. Funakoshi, in his struggles in the chaos of militarized war-time Japan, relegated the kata to something that is done at the end of class, if there is time.

This is a terrible development in karate history. Since the kata make up the database of Shotokan's most violent and interesting techniques, combinations, and strategies, losing these kata is like having your company's database of information suddenly lose an entire block of billing records, addresses, and phone numbers. It is a horrible thing! In order for the database to retain referential integrity, all of the kata must be preserved, and more and more kata from other systems must be integrated into Shotokan Karate so that we can further understand the ones that we already study.

This is just further reason why we must retain communication between as many of the instructor level players as possible. No one person will have interest in all of these kata, but many people together can cover all of that knowledge simultaneously. The real question is, "Can they learn to get along?"

As one of my respected colleagues said, "Shotokan schools make great white belts. They make the best white belts in the world. Unfortunately, they stay white belts forever, and never stop doing white belt stuff long enough to learn anything really interesting."



Enbusen

The performance line for a kata is called an enbusen. You can think of an enbusen as the footprints on the floor of a dance school. The enbusen tells you where you will begin, where you will finish, and everywhere that you will go during the performance of a kata. Knowing the enbusen for your kata is pretty important.

Have you ever tried practicing kata in your basement, garage, or some other enclosed space and run into the walls? People who run into the walls of their house or dojo don't understand just how important it is to know the enbusen of the kata you practice like the back of your hand.

演舞線

Kanji for enbusen. The first two characters, enbu, mean performance. The next one, sen, means line. An enbusen is a performance line of a kata.

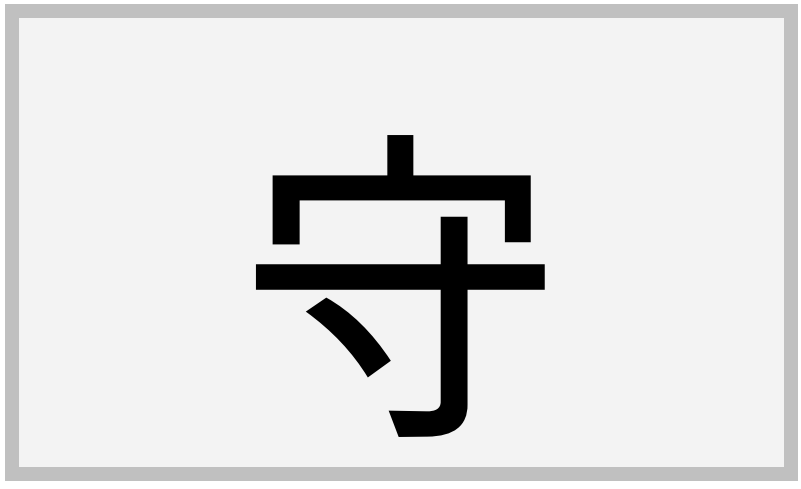
If you know your kata enbusen by heart, you should be able to look around any training area and see where you are going to go. If you are about to perform Enpi, you know that if you are in the front left corner of the dojo, you are going to run into the walls. Enpi goes to the front and to the left in a reverse L. Having that enbusen pattern in your mind

is an invaluable tool, and it should be a required skill that you be able to draw the enbusen of any kata you are claiming to have mastered.

The relationship between enbusen and kata is very important. The single kanji that is used to represent the word "kata" in the Japanese language is constructed of three other kanji. Those kanji are shape, cut, and ground. A kata is something that cuts a shape in the ground, and that shape is an enbusen.



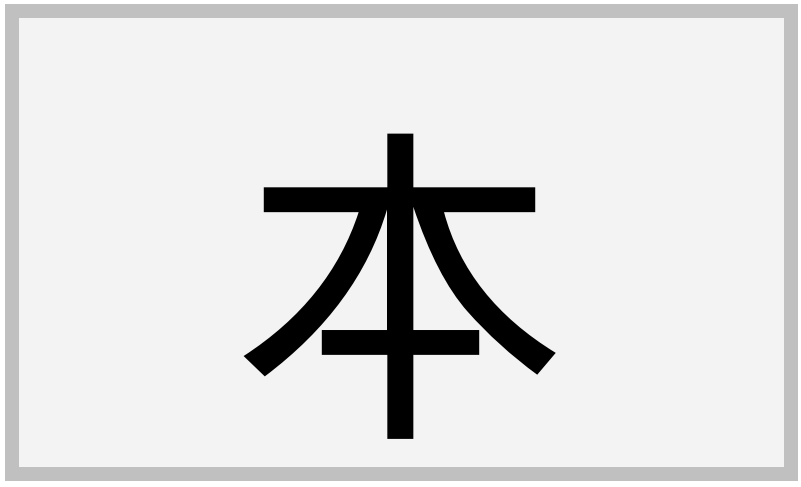
Once when on vacation in Florida, I was practicing kata on the beach behind our hotel. I performed Sochin a few times, and then I went up to the hotel deck to take a swim. As I walked up on the deck, I looked down at the sand I had been training on for just a second. I turned away from it, stopped, and turned back. Sitting on the beach was the kanji for the word **mamoru** - protect.



Kanji for mamoru. It means “protect.”

Mamoru and the Sochin enbusen look very much like one another. After that experience, I asked several Japanese instructors both in Japan and the United States if they agreed that Sochin drew the character for protect on the ground. My suggestion was met with denials and "No, I don't see it." But I clearly do see it. Do you see it? Turn the character on its side and compare it to the enbusen picture above. See it?

I realize that the similarity is not absolutely perfect, but so what? When I noticed it, I immediately wondered what other kanji enbusen might look like. I found some pretty interesting ones. The kata Kanku-Dai draws a character in the ground that is almost a perfect representation of the character **hon** - which means root, source, book, and other things. All of the meanings of those words are strikingly applicable to the kata Kanku-Dai.



Kanji for “hon.” It means “root”, “source”, “book”. All very appropriate to the database model.

The Heian kata seem to draw the character Hei on the ground. To get that character, just take all of their enbusen and lay them on top of each other. In particular, lay the Heian 2 enbusen on top of the Heian 3 enbusen, and you get a perfect character for Hei. Some others have suggested that the other three Heian draw the An character on the floor when laid upon each other, but I have more trouble seeing that.

At any rate, I find it absolutely amazing that no Japanese to this point has pointed out that kata enbusen may be related to kanji which have some meaning to the kata. What's really funny to me is that the Japanese cannot see the meanings in their own names screaming at them from the kanji that they sign documents with all day long. Because of that, I am somewhat less amazed that they do not see the kanji in the patterns left in the sand by a kata performance.

And, if you want to go even farther, imagine what message may be encoded when you take the kanji that all of the kata draw, and then arrange them into a sentence, removing the more modern creations. OK, OK. That last one is just my imagination at work, so don't go around telling people that Rob Redmond thinks that the kata have a hidden message encoded in the enbusen patterns. But the thought is intriguing.

Now that I have mentioned it, I may as well prepare myself for the criticisms that call this document The DaRedmond Code or some other equally humorous nickname.

The problem with finding kanji in enbusen is that I am only going to find kanji that I am familiar with, and I never learned more than 1500 of them. There are about 25,000 kanji, and 10,000 are formally codified in Japanese. So, it's not exactly a scientific pursuit to run around finding kanji patterns in the sand of the beaches of Florida after performing kata. It's more like a bizarre ink blot test in which you look for patterns that reveal weaknesses in your psyche.

That feature of the human mind is called Reticular Activation. After I purchased a Jeep Wrangler, I suddenly noticed Jeep Wranglers were being driven by what seemed to be every other person. Before I bought it, I was unaware of their existence. After I purchased it, I was looking for them. The same can be said of this little mental play of mine into kanji found in kata enbusen.

The Japanese I approached waved their hands, shook their heads, and told me to train more and think less. They were unimpressed and thought that I was being ridiculous. Perhaps they are right. It could just be a coincidence. However, because the same Japanese also waved their hands and denied that Tanaka means "middle of the rice paddy," I wasn't swayed very much by their denials.

Knowing the enbusen for your kata can be not only rewarding, but also fun and intriguing for those of us also studying the Japanese language. I wouldn't expect anything that will help your karate to come of it, unless fighting boredom keeps you training. That might be a good reason to study this phenomenon, even if there is no merit to it.

Enbusen



Dai and Sho

The Heian kata are arranged in a fashion where the names of the kata indicate the level of the kata. Heian Shodan is Heian First Level. Heian Nidan is Heian Second Level. The Tekki are named in the same fashion, with a 1-2-3 sort of naming scheme. The other kata are not named using such a numerical scheme, though because of the sounds of the Japanese language, many Westerners may think that they are.

Bassai-Dai and Bassai-Sho are paired with one another because they are both Bassai kata. One is tagged with the suffix -Dai, which means "big." The other Bassai kata is



Kanji for “dai.” It means “big”, “large”, “major”.

tagged with the suffix -Sho, which is the character for "small." Big Bassai and Small Bassai.

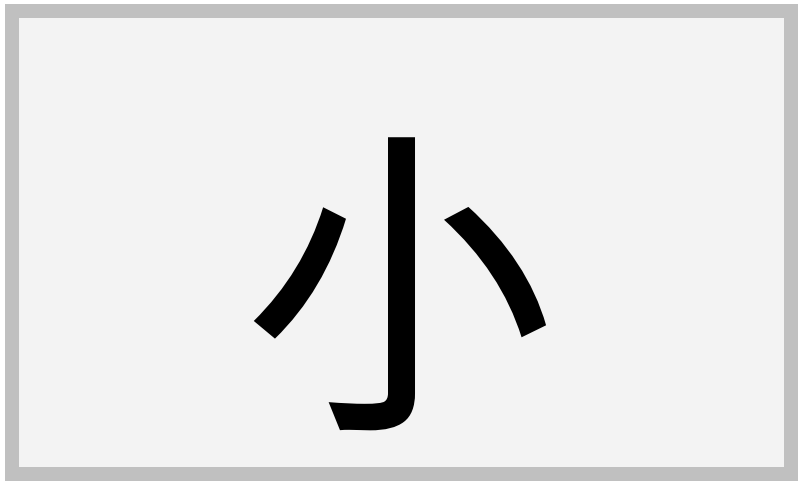
The Sho kata is thought by most to be the more advanced of the two. As evidence of this thinking, notice that the testing curriculum of most Shotokan associations does not even allow the student to choose Bassai-Sho until 3rd dan.

The same is true of other Dai/Sho pairings. Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho are arranged the same way. One kata is thought to be the more advanced, and is withheld from students until later in their training. I believe Nakayama was trying to arrange the kata in their order of perceived difficulty when he published his ***Best Karate*** series.

I have a couple of theories about this. First of all, I do not believe that the -Dai kata is truly less advanced. The -Dai kata is placed earlier in the curriculum because it is considered more relevant to the basic techniques taught to students in the earlier stages of training.

But there is a Dai/Sho pairing of kata that does not fit in.

The Gojushiho pair are reversed in their naming according to the scheme used by most organizations. It's obvious to anyone who familiar with both Bassai and both Kanku kata



Kanji for “sho.” It means “small”, “minor”.

that the -Sho kata is typically less punch/kick oriented and less "Shotokanish." Unlike Bassai and Kanku, the Gojushiho pair of kata are reversed: the kata with all of the smaller hand actions and the smaller enbusen is named with a -Dai suffix. The larger-scale kata is named Gojushiho-Sho.

But wait, there's more. Some instructors haven't gone with the naming scheme, and they still call the Gojushiho-Dai kata by the name Gojushiho-Sho and vice versa. Therefore, whenever I am talking with someone about that kata, which is a rare thing since so few people know the kata, I usually stop and ask, "Are we talking about Mr. Back stance or Mr. Pointy Fingers? Which do you call -Sho?" Without a common frame of reference, the Dai/Sho suffixes are irrelevant.

The story that supposedly explains this involves a famous instructor in a large Karate organization back in the 1970's announcing that he was about to perform Gojushiho-Sho (Mr. Pointy Fingers) and then performing Gojushiho-Dai (Mr. Back stance) by mistake.

Because he was already queued up to win, since winning a big tournament in Japan is rarely a tremendous surprise due to the levels of politics involved in becoming a seriously considered candidate to win, to avoid humiliating him, they simply awarded him the trophy, shrugged, and said, "What the hell. Who cares?" and went on with their lives.

However, all those watching then started flipping the names back and forth, and then Nakayama documented the name change in his kata series and managed to have the names flipped over the course of a decade. Now, no one can remember what happened.

Is that story true? If I knew for a fact it was true, I would have told the guy's name. I've done some asking around, but I have never asked him personally if it is true, and most people who would know seem to think the story is just a myth.

Perhaps it is. But Kanazawa, Nakayama's most revered student, still calls the Gojushiho kata using the old, now reversed, Dai/Sho names in his book on kata. Apparently he didn't think too much of the name change. His organization follows his convention, and meanwhile, the folks who do the single Useishi kata found in Shito-Ryu and Okinawan Shorin Ryu just look on wondering how the world we Shotokan folks ended up with two slightly different versions of the same kata with all of the applications and interesting major points sanitized out of them.

Dai and Sho



Competition Kata

All kata were created equal. They are all sets of movements performing routines of basic techniques. Some of the techniques might be particularly interesting and new for the performer, as might be the ordering of the techniques and the performance line and pace of the kata itself. Sometimes there are even athletic movements in kata, but they all resolve down to being little more than series of techniques.

But some kata are more equal than others.

In a Shotokan style tournament, all but the last round of kata competition involves two players performing a randomly chosen kata at the same time. One wears a red tag or belt, and the judges hold white and red flags. Whichever player gets 3 of the 5 judge's flags raised after the performance advances to the next round in single elimination.

In the first round, the competitors will have kata chosen for them by the senior referee from among the five Heian kata and the first Tekki. Eventually in later rounds, the referees begin selecting kata from the so-called Big Four: Bassai-Dai, Kanku-Dai, Jion, and Enpi.

The final round is individual selection. The competitors are allowed to perform their favorite kata.

From watching endless years of these competitions, it is clear that Unsu, Sochin, Gojushiho-Sho, and Kanku-Sho are crowd pleasing choices and are considered the most beautiful of the Shotokan kata.

Others, such as Hangetsu, Wankan, Jutte, Gankaku, Bassai-Sho, Nijushiho, and Meikyo receive a lot less play in competitions than the pretty kata mentioned before.
The reason for this effect could be that only this small, select group of kata are attractive enough to students and spectators alike to make them successful choices in competition. The daring jump in Unsu is difficult to top with the plodding, ordinary, quarter-beat rhythm and pace of Jutte.

Is it evidence that Shotokan's curriculum of kata is too short a list to provide enough competition-quality kata to choose from, so everyone ends up performing the same four kata over and over – much to the derision of referees who wish they could be freed from watching 18 renditions of Unsu?



A New Old View of Kata

We have looked at kata and how they flowed through time to come to us in the present day. We have also mentioned how some of the kata are not old at all, and they have been created as recently as the mid 20th Century. Of the Goju-Ryu kata, most come to us from the 19th Century. Of the Shorin kata, which make up most of the Shotokan curriculum, they seem to be a little older, but also a little simpler. And Shotokan's versions of those kata have been heavily edited by experts to create multiple kata, or to simplify them, or to change some of the moves so that the entire kata seemed to flow better.

We have seen that kata are not really doing anything, that it is the people who create kata and learn the kata of others who serve both as the mechanism through which they are preserved and the source at which they are created. We have covered the fact that some people prefer to study a very few kata deeply, and that others prefer to study as many as fifty kata in a less obsessive way. We have also challenged the idea of rigid style definitions containing kata and existing separately from one another on Okinawa – coming to grips with the idea that before Karate reached mainland Japan, the kata were traded around like baseball cards, and the Okinawans concerned themselves with individual instructors, not styles.

What we have not mentioned yet is the modern creation of kata. It seems that ever since Karate arrived in Japan, the tendency has been away from each generation attempting to improve upon what it was given and toward preserving the past. Instead of learning a few kata, getting some ideas, and perhaps creating a kata, a modern expert might never attempt to create anything, and instead will simply bury himself in the work of others.

But we have also seen that Shotokan experts tend to prefer four kata above all others. When we sit in the stands of any Shotokan tournament, we know that we are going to see those four kata repeatedly. We might see some more unusual kata from some participants, but the four pretty kata are going to make an appearance. They always do. They win.

This tells me that we have an opportunity to involve ourselves in an activity that has fallen out of fashion. We could let go of Limitation Disease, the disease in which the human mind, having defined a concept, cannot let go of its understanding of the limits and boundaries created by the definition it has come to accept. We could stop thinking in terms of "learning a style," and instead think in terms of "learning Karate."

That was what Funakoshi' Karate seems to have originally been about. When he landed in Japan, he authored a book that same year in which he listed many of the kata available for the student to explore. The list was much longer than the one Shotokan players allow themselves today.

Likewise, when Nakayama, one of the people most directly responsible for documenting the list of acceptable kata, created the Best Karate series of books, he repeatedly mentions that there are required kata and free kata. He lists among the free kata the many kata of Goju-Ryu, which he seems to support the practice of amongst his Shotokan followers.

Unfortunately, this concept of practicing with limits for novices and without limits for experts has not fully caught on in the Karate community as of this writing, and many people are still convinced that if they learn a kata from a different style or created a new kata themselves, that something bad will come of it, and their practice and enjoyment of Karate will suffer.

The Shotokan kata curriculum enforced most everywhere could be expanded to create more variety in one of two ways. Advanced Karate experts could create more kata and add them to the curriculum by teaching them and allowing them to be chosen for performance in competitions, or kata that already exist in others styles could be allowed to be performed, dropping some of the current boundaries that exist between styles of Japanese Karate.

This issue remains a point of debate between Shotokan experts who consider themselves traditionalists and more liberal Shotokan experts. Should instructors learn kata from other systems or engage in creating their own? Hard-liners say that the practice will corrupt the system, result in too many kata, and decrease emphasis on training the basic techniques by creating too many topics to study at once.

They say that the fifteen kata that Funakoshi recommended in his book as enough should truly be enough for anyone. Others say that the Twenty Six should be enough, and that since no one can master all of them, reaching out to another style or making our own would take away time best spent learning the old kata and unlocking the secrets they have hidden away in them.

They also worry that if people begin creating kata, that those kata will be of lower quality than those that went before, because we no longer practice the Jujutsu portion of our martial art, and therefore anything we make will be more reflective of either dancing to do performance art or moving as if we are point sparring. They worry that these hideous creations will become the norm and that the Karate they love will become polluted, less respectable, and ultimately cease to be.

"Decadent and corrupt," I believe the hard-line communists used to say when I was younger.

But not everyone feels that way. Some experts with long years of training have challenged that concept and the Japanese tendencies to preserve and conserve. They have at some point decided that their Karate is their own, and that they can make anything they want of it after they have learned enough.

Asai Tetsuhiko, a famous instructor in Japan who passed away recently, took the creative option, and during his tenure as the leader of his association, he added kata after kata to the curriculum that he had created, practically doubling the list of acceptable kata for his students. Currently I believe they have a list of 48 possible kata they can select from in tournaments.

Kanazawa Hirokazu, another famous instructor regarded for his excellent technique, has taken up the option of importing kata and even other martial arts exercises into his Karate practice to enlarge the size of the curriculum. He has worked diligently to incorporate the practice of Tai Chi into his Karate, and he has also reached out for some of the Shorin kata that Shotokan currently is lacking, and he has modified them for practice.

These two men left their old Karate association and branched out on their own, forming their own organizations of which they were the heads. The hard-liners would argue that it is OK for the conservative man at the top of the food chain to import or create kata for his students to practice because he is a master. But, they say, the rest of us are mere students and should not ever engage in this process.

Quite a few experts of Karate in the West disagree.

Some are actively engaged in the creative process, having fully matured in their Karate practice from youthful obedience to adolescent assertion of resistance, finally reaching adult-like independence. They have found that their Karate practice was not destroyed or harmed by spending some time attempting to create a kata or two, just to see what would happen. And not all of the kata they have created have been musical dance routines with throbbing rhythms and lasers bouncing off of mirrored balls hanging from the ceiling.

Some have created some pretty interesting work.

And even more experts have found that Shotokan's curriculum is limiting for the highly intelligent, and that sitting in the next room is Goju-Ryu or Shito-Ryu, a style with more kata to choose from. Cherry picking what they see as the best kata from these styles, these experts are doing what Nakayama recommended: they are selecting their kata from wherever they like. Perhaps learning Seipai, Seisan, or Suparinpei and practicing it regularly as if it were a Shotokan kata.

Their uniforms are not suddenly printed with American flags all over them, they are not performing to music, and they are not incorporating cartwheels, backflips, or over-produced movements like full splits into their kata.

They are simply enjoying Karate.

I was born in the town that I live in today. I think what a shame it would be if I were to die here without ever having seen what the rest of the world has to offer. Perhaps for a while I will live by the beach, or in the heart of the mountains. I have enjoyed my travels to the deserts, to the far East, and to Europe.

Just because I have not seen everything my home town has to offer does not mean that I am obligated to see everything it has to offer. I will see what I want to see, because as I have grown older, I have learned what I believe is an important lesson:

Life is too short.



The 23 Principles of Excellent Kata

Over the years, I have concerned myself with what qualities go into making a kata a winning kata in a competition. Since the average Karate player is far more likely to perform a kata in a competition and be humiliated than they are to be attacked and die because they couldn't remember an application, most people seem to be interested in knowing how to polish their kata.

1. Dress to play
2. Dramatic rhythm
3. Reasonable Pace
4. Look before turning
5. Fix the eyes
6. Turn without leaning
7. Coordination and Isolation
8. Train across transitions
9. Kiai with confidence
10. Posture of a model
11. Strong, flexible stance
12. Precision and accuracy
13. Consistency
14. Complete motion
15. Breath control
16. Swift feet
17. Know the line
18. Approach without concern
19. Accept Imperfection
20. Swing the hips
21. The Geometry of Bonsai
22. Nail the climax
23. Start clean and Finish strong

Yes, I know. You are not interested in performing your kata in a competition. They are a practice for fighting, and through the practice of kata, you preserve the ancient past, prove your never-ending loyalty to your master, and master the secret ways of killing other people.

But just in case you ever happen to find yourself in a Karate tournament, perhaps you will find these principles to be helpful.

Following are chapters which discuss each of these principles in detail.



Principle 1: Dress to Play

While I was sitting in the gymnasium of my high school getting ready to stand up, walk to the podium, accept my diploma, and never look back, the Chief Operating Officer of Lanier Worldwide, Lance Herrin, gave a rousing graduation speech with the intent of waking us up to the realities of the real world. He said to always remember three points for success in the business world.

1. Dress to play
2. Play to win
3. Be on time

I have since learned that there is considerably more to succeeding in the business world than these three principles. However, the advice is sound for a kid coming out of high school, for too many young people are obsessed with idealistic ideas that do not play out in the economics of the real world.

Thinking that the world is one big happy love-fest of acceptance and tolerance following their government-sponsored and heavily politically correct educations, kids entering college are often under the impression than their piercings, tattoos, and baggy clothes are not really relevant to who they are. They believe that what is important is the person within and courteous behavior, not appearance.

And, of course they are right. Ethically speaking, it is a fairly universal principle that it doesn't matter how we dress, how we wear our facial hair, or how we have our hair cut as to whether or not we are a good person. People should not judge us based on appearances, right?

Too bad, because that is exactly what humans do when they see us. They judge us based on our appearance. It is an ancient instinct to observe other people and attempt to determine whether or not they are an enemy or an ally. It is not something that we can let go of simply by deciding that such shallow bigotries are not rational.

Right or wrong, people do it. Because they do it, we must account for it. This is an unfortunate truth, but if we want to increase our chances of winning a competition based on visual observance of us performing a war dance, we must choose to either play to the judge's basest instincts or make a stance on principle.

If we stand on principle, we should not be surprised if we receive negative feedback. People are shallow. Nothing will change that. Protesting will not change it. Defying accepted standards of dress and appearance will not change it.

I am fully in favor of swimming upstream, but I also recognize that sometimes going against the current of the water I am swimming in will make things more difficult for me.

Appearance is a zero sum game. Either your appearance is in your way, hurting your chances of winning a competition, distracting people from paying attention to your kata skills, or your appearance is good enough that it is invisible and the judges and onlookers focus on your performance instead of your look.

I have never heard a kata competitor complimented on their nice haircut, their nice uniform, or the colorful patches they wore. Nor have I ever heard anyone walk up to a kata champion and say, "That belt is fascinating. Simply excellent kata with an excellent belt!" That is not how it works.

Appearance either harms your chances or gets out of the way. So, how to make appearances get out of your way? I'll start with the top of the human body and work my way down.

Hair

If you are a man, wearing your hair long is going to hurt you. You just can't get a break with long hair. Think about it. If you wear your hair short, no one is going to be offended. It is boring and people look past short hair. If you have no hair, hardly anyone is going to notice that, either. Once you start performing a kata, short hair and baldness just fade into the background. They are non-controversial appearance choices.

But, long hair on a man, even in the 21st Century, still predisposes to think negatively of you. It's your hair, so wear it the way you like. Life is too short to live for other people. But also recognize the social consequences that you will have to live with and choose whether or not they are acceptable.

Men with long hair can wear their hair down or pull it back in a pony tail. If a man wears a pony tail, and five men watch him perform a kata, my guess is that at least one if not two of those men are thinking, "Why doesn't he get a hair cut?" instead of focusing on his abilities. They might also have fleeting thoughts about how the pony tail looks like a woman's pony tail. They might wonder if the hair being pulled back is uncomfortable. All of these thoughts are things you do not want judges of your kata thinking. You want them thinking about your motions, not your hair.

Wearing your hair down is probably even worse.

Going into a kata competition with long, sweaty hair makes the judges wonder whether or not it feels as nasty sticking to your face as it looks. They might be imagining grabbing

that hair and pulling it while chopping your neck or otherwise applying some technique against you. And, every time it gets in your eyes, they will wonder if you can see. Any sharp head motions will send hair flying about you in a whirl.

Women should always wear their hair back in a pony tail if it is long. A woman with sweaty hair stuck to her face will also be a distraction.

Enough about hair. The bottom line is that men with short hair remove their hair cut from their list of obstacles when they compete. It will not be the deciding factor, but it is a contributor, as are all other appearance issues.

Beards
Men with full beards don't do as well as men without. Again, the judges are staring at your appearance during a kata, and they are wondering if the beard itches, etc.

Unusual designs in facial hair, such as artistic removal of all hair except for a patch beneath the lip, etc, will also possibly distract.

I believe a closely trimmed goatee can be gotten away with without too much negative impact to scores these days, but if it is a Civil War era mustache and chin hair, it will distract and obstruct.

Body Hair
Every time I write about this topic, I cannot believe I am even bringing this up, but unfortunately, I have to if I am going to feel that I have covered appearance completely. Men with a huge amount of fur sticking out of their karate uniforms will probably suffer for it. Again, it will not cost you a title, but it will be a contributing factor.

Men, those of you who are fuzzy like bears might consider shaving on the morning of a tournament. Sorry, guys, but while some ladies like it, most men are not so well endowed with body hair, and they are all wondering if your uniform ever touches your skin and are marveling at the way it sticks up through your collar.

Like all appearance issues, it is one of balancing personal principles against possible consequences and living with the decision. I think it is incredibly shallow, and I'm not sure I am desperate enough to win to do these things. However, every time I have lost, I have wondered why I stood on any principles at all!

Physique
I'll just write it and throw it out there: Fat people don't win kata competitions. I don't care what your instructor tells you about your heavy build being suited to a particular kata, no one wants to see a man who is obese perform a kata. Kata champions are universally thin people in excellent physical condition.

I've been a lot of tournaments. Every time I have been defeated in a kata competition, the person was as thin or thinner than myself. I have never lost, even after serious blunders, to someone who weighed three hundred pounds and who was shaped like two legs with a huge pear mounted to the top.

Discussing diet and exercise is beyond the scope of this book, so I won't go into that. But I will say, as someone on a harsh diet and exercise regime for medical reasons, that getting control of your shape is within your grasp, and is a deal breaker in competitions.

If you are seriously overweight such that you have a 50 inch waist, don't even enter. You've already lost.

People are shallow when they are judging athletic competitions such as the war dance of kata. When they see that weight, the wonder how you could possibly be practicing adequately leading up to the tournament.

Body Proportions
Your chances of winning a kata competition drop the farther your body strays from symmetrical and evenly proportioned. Most do not want to believe it, but this can contribute to distraction as much as being obese. Being a very, very tall and very thin person hurts the more tall and the more thin you are. There is something about seeing a very tall person attempt to make a Karate stance and step around the floor that does not sit well visually on a very thin person.

It may be cruel to even bring this topic up, since none of us is in control of our overall skeletal shape. However, it is a factor, and I want to have mentioned it so that you have full information when you step into the ring. This does affect your chances, and should you lose to someone no more skilled than you, notice their body and truthfully consider if they are not built "better," even if it is only better in the eyes of the most shallow person you know.

Uniforming
Here is something that plays a significant role in either harming or helping your performance. If you enter a kata competition, and your Karate uniform was given to you free with your lessons, you've started off at a disadvantage. Kata champions in Japan have their uniforms constructed for them custom fit by sending their measurements in and having the uniform produced specifically for them.

They have the uniform dry cleaned and pressed before the competition, and they do not train in their kata competition uniform. That way, it has no yellow stains under the arms, no tears in the arm pits, no hole in the rear, no faded patch, no wrinkly appearance, and no rolled up sleeves or pants.

In the world of Karate uniforms, at least in Japan, we seem to have left behind the uniforms of the 1970's where the jacket was short and the pants were ankle length. Today, the preference seems to be for a very long, perhaps oversize jacket and pants that are cut at least three or four inches above the top of the foot. Sleeves are also preferred three inches above the wrist.

Why? Because such a uniform reduces the impact of body shape and reshapes the body. It also creates a lot of moving cloth that creates the appearance of dynamically turning hips. The tighter uniform with a shorter jacket exposes more of what is really going on to the judges. The longer jacket hides the hips and the tails fly out when the hips turn. It's really pretty simple.

Belts
If I could just get a nickel from the sale of every embroidered black belt ever sold in history, I think I would be a rich man. But have all of these expensive belts contributed to anyone winning a kata competition?

No, I don't think so. I believe that as long as the belt is not too long, which is touching the kneecaps while standing, or too short, which is so short that it doesn't reach the edge of the tails of your jacket, then it probably doesn't help anything to have an expensive belt.

However, I do recommend you acquire or create a softened belt. The softer the belt, the more likely it is to fly about you while turning your hips, which looks good in a kata competition.

The embroidery on your belt is probably not going to help anything at all. Spend your money on this sort of thing only if you personally like it. I doubt you will stand on the champion's podium because of the writing on your belt.

An Apology
To those of you who are reading this text simply to learn about kata, and not how to win in a competition, because for you, kata are an ancient secret of fighting principles and applications which you would never dirty by dancing around in a competition in a big, poofy uniform with a soft, swinging belt, I must sincerely apologize.

However, I do not see how I could write a book about Karate kata without touching on the topic of how visual they are and how other visual nuances will either enhance or take away from the effect the performer might be attempting to produce.

To the overweight and yet very tall rock musician with tattoos, piercings, a lot of body hair, and an old yellowing uniform, yes, you could possibly be the exception. Or perhaps you are skilled enough that these things do not impact you as much as I think they might.

I only ask that you remain open to the possibility that they impact the way others react to you more than you think they might.

Right or wrong, good or bad, people are predisposed to including appearance in their judgment of others.



Principle 2: Dramatic Rhythm

Every kata is essentially a stream of ordered techniques and steps to rhythm. Perform ten punches in a row, and you have a kata. But that's not enough. You have to know what rhythm to use when you do them. Should to punch twice quickly, wait a moment, and then punch again twice together? Or should you perform all ten of the punches in an even rhythm with the same wait time between each? Once you have the techniques and the rhythm, you have a kata.

The question is "What kind of a rhythm?"

The answer to that is very subjective. As a fan of moderation, my preference is to neither see a performance that is plodding an boring, where every technique is performed on a single, even beat, nor see a performance where drama becomes melodrama.

Back when I was young, the biggest problem with most people's kata was a complete lack of drama. People tended to perform a kata with a very even, uninteresting rhythm. However, with the advent of the Internet and videos being traded around on the Internet, now everyone has access to see and replay some really dramatic performances of kata.

And from what I am seeing, the videos that are most popular seem to be the ones where the drama is a little over-cooked.

To avoid falling in the trap of being an extremist when it comes to kata rhythm, here are some tips:

- In the ***Best Karate*** series by Nakayama, there is a rhythm given for performing the kata. Follow that. It's not bad.

- When you pause between groups of techniques performed quickly together, one second is a long enough time to wait holding any pose before you move on. Pausing longer than that is far too much. Some might say one second is too

much.

- Slow techniques should be performed slowly, and there is a rhythm within the technique as well as the kata as a whole. Perform slow techniques a bit quickly at first, then slow the technique down, until finally the hand is barely moving at the end. Simply going slowly isn't sufficient these days to impress anyone.

- Don't confuse rhythm with pace. Pace is how fast the entire set of techniques is performed as a whole. Rhythm is the beat of the kata – the variation between short and long pauses between techniques.

- Slow techniques should be performed around 4 seconds to 5 seconds long. Longer than that, and you are being melodramatic.

- Groups of techniques performed together in pairs, such as double punches, should be performed in a single exhalation. From that pair of techniques, the entire rhythm of the kata scales down. For example, in Kanku-Sho, there is an inside block, two punches, and then a turn with a downward and inside blocking motion in a back stance. When performing that group of techniques, do not perform all four at the same beat. Do the block, pause slightly, punch twice with no pause, and then turn and block letting the turn make the pause for you.

- Rhythm in kata is just like the rhythm in music. If you have excellent rhythm, watching a kata can be as wonderful as listening to music. If you overdo it or have little variation in rhythm, watching your kata can be like listening to very harsh, incompetent music or even worse, like listening to a very dull speech.

As a training tool unrelated to performing your kata for others to look at, ignore the rhythm, and simply blast through sections of the kata or the entire kata as if you were in a fight for your life. You might learn something from this experience, especially if you try it starting in the middle of a large gym where you have plenty of room and wear a blindfold. A friend of mine used to refer to this as "fighting kata."

Good rhythm is essential to performing an excellent kata. But it is by no means the only principle nor even the most important one. There are many others.



Principle 3: Reasonable Pace

It is difficult to separate the topics of rhythm and pace, but they are distinctly different things. The rhythm is determined by the amount of variation and the changes in timing between techniques. The pace is determined by the overall speed at which you "play your song."

Think of it this way. A song has a rhythm. It has a beat, and the guitar, drums, and singer all sing along to the rhythm set by the drummer. Now, speed up the playback of that same song, and the rhythm stays the same, however, the song plays much, much faster and begins to sound cartoonish and silly. By increasing the overall speed of your kata, you increase the pace, but do not necessarily change the rhythm.

The pace of the kata determines how long the kata will take. In his book ***Karate-Do Kyohan***, Funakoshi says that beginners will take around 40 seconds to perform Taikyoku Shodan. However, he also says that more advanced students will perform the kata in just five or six seconds! That is really quite fast!

Altering the timing like that might involve increasing the pace to such a frantic level that technique and execution become blurry and difficult to perform to any sort of expectation. It might even involve removing all pauses from the kata, so that the rhythm too is eliminated and the kata simply becomes a very fast stream of techniques.

The difference between pace and rhythm, and the relationship between them, can be leveraged for better kata performances. In an overly melodramatic kata performance, the pace will be very, very slow, despite a few rapid sequences of techniques, because the performer will draw out the pauses and slow techniques to create so much range of rhythm that a lot of time will be consumed.

In a kata performance with very little rhythmic change, the pace will be quicker usually, because without some sense of grouping techniques together through insertion of "dead time" in between them, there is little to slow the performer down other than an inability to move faster.

Principle 3: Reasonable Pace

When practicing and performing your kata, attempt to maintain a reasonable pace to the kata while also dramatizing rhythm. When pace and rhythm become too extreme at either end of the spectrum, the human mind loses concentration and no longer links one part of the performance with the rest.

Those old videos of Japanese Shotokan tournaments from the 1970's and 1980's are great for learning about proper pace combined with proper rhythm. These days, a very slow pace and melodramatic rhythm seems to be in fashion in many circles.



Principle 4: Look Before Turning

You would not assume, perhaps, that looking before you turn would be a major principle of excellent kata performance, but I believe it is. A kata performer that is properly uniformed and using an excellent pace and rhythm is only accentuated by the visual appearance of his head snapping this way and that in the direction that he will move next.

As my instructor, Mr. Katayama Hitoshi of Nagoya, Japan, used to say, "Turning your head to look before moving should be a separate count in the kata books."

In fact, when teaching kata and counting out loud for the class to follow, I do give a separate count for the head turns where it is applicable. This is not only for appearance sake, but also for the well-being of the performer. It is always a good idea to step into a direction after looking first, and it helps the performer keep their sense of balance about them under pressure.

Observe any ice skater as they twist on the ice spinning around and around. They look at one object, and then snap their heads around to look at that same spot again and again as they spin. Why? It prevents them from becoming dizzy.

So, for the reasons of appearance, safety, good fighting habits, and your ability to turn without stumbling or falling over, when you are going to change direction in a kata, before you move your feet, snap your head to look in that direction.



Principle 5: Fix the Eyes

One of the more common technique weaknesses I have identified both in my own abilities and in those of others when performing any kind of Karate techniques is an inability to isolate one motion from another. People naturally want to make one hand do what the other one is doing. It's the old "Pat your head and rub your tummy" problem with coordination.

One of the most obvious ways in which Shotokan people are affected by this lack of coordination is when they perform techniques which require them to rotate their hips to the side. Invariably, without thinking, the Karate expert will also turn his head a little so that his nose no longer points at the opponent in front of him, but instead about 10 to 30 degrees off of center.

In order to maintain eye contact, the expert will cut his eyes themselves to the side and look through the corners of his eyes. Rotating back to square-on, the nose will point forward again.

It is important, both for appearance sake, and also for effective optics when scanning your opponent for openings or incoming attacks, to ensure that the nose points at the opponent at all times.

When fighting under pressure, a Karate expert who becomes nervous will experience a sensation known as tunnel vision. His visual acuity is reduced, as is the width of his field of vision. As a result, he sees much less well and much less than he usually sees when he is calm. This effect is more pronounced as the performer experiences more and more pressure.

When peripheral vision begins to shut down, it is a good idea to not be using it to scan your opponent for targets. Thus, keeping the eyeballs in the center of the sockets, where they see best, by keeping the head pointing nose-directly-at-opponent will be most effective.

Also, it should be noted that when the head and feet remain perfectly still while the rest of the body is violently gyrating in order to create very powerful appearing techniques, the effect is visually dramatic and shows a high level of coordination that referees and spectators alike will appreciate, even if they do not know why.



Principle 6: Turn Without Leaning

There are two prevalent methodologies taught for turning in Shotokan Karate clubs. The first is a leaning turn, where the Karate player is asked to prepare a block, reach a foot out behind him or to the side, and then straighten up and block while rotating into the turn. The other kind of turn is performed by staying upright, and instead pulling the feet together, and then spinning in place, only stepping out after the spin is complete.

I prefer the second method for a number of reasons.

I believe that reaching out with the foot is a poor practice for someone who is practicing a fighting art to engage in. While leaning back with a foot extended, all sorts of vulnerabilities are opened up while the ability to react to changing events is suppressed by the leaning, over-extended posture.

The hips cannot counter-rotate with the block as they should, and instead end up spinning in the direction of the turn and yet rotating against it. This seems to nullify the effect of using the hips in the first place to me.

It is almost impossible to look before turning with the leaning turn as well.

Therefore, I prefer to pull in my rear foot, squeeze down low on my two feet while spinning, and then step out in the direction I plan to travel. Since posture, as we will discuss later, is such an important part of kata performance, turning without leaning is going to yield better results with judges and spectators as well.



Principle 7: Coordination and Isolation

A major difficulty in teaching basic techniques to beginners is the inherent inability a human being has to separate what one limb is doing from the other. Even more difficult: isolating the flex of one muscle from a neighboring muscle. Now, consider the difficulty in trying to consciously control the various levels of isolation required across every limb, both sides of the body, the front and back of the body, and the top and the bottom.

The thought of it is so complex that most people simply skip the training required to automate the ability to isolate body motions away from one another and instead attempt to teach each entire technique holistically.

But superior results can be obtained at a technical level by breaking every technique down into the simplest, smallest motions which compose it, and practicing each of those motions separately without the rest of the body following along, and then learning to integrate slowly other body parts along with the technique so that coordination is learned.

Think about the word “coordination.” Most people use the word to mean that someone has high dexterity. But that is not really what the word means, is it? Coordination means the ability to coordinate several different tasks simultaneously such that all are executed properly. Coordination is the ability to automate the synchronization and isolation of body parts and motions used in just about everything.

Learning true coordination allows the kata performer to kick without leaning back, to step forward without ducking the head forward, to round kick without straightening the elbows, to punch without tensing muscles in the face. Coordination allows for the truly dynamic, relaxed, speedy technique that everyone wants to have.

Breaking techniques and motions apart into their components and repeating those components while integrating them step by step is the only way that I know of to truly learn this. “Step and punch like this…” is not the most effective or informative form of technical training.



Principle 8: Train Across Transitions

When practicing kata by breaking them down into sequences of two, three, or up to six techniques, most Karate players use predictable sequences of techniques as their combinations. For example, the first two techniques of Heian Shodan, then the turn and the next two techniques might be considered two combinations worthy of considerable practice.

However, there is another, more effective way to practice sequences from a kata. Practice across the transitions.

By this, I mean that instead of taking sequences of steps in a straight line or techniques leading up to a turn, instead perform the techniques around and including the turn or whatever other transition might exist. Practice the second, third, and fourth movements from Heian Shodan repeatedly, instead of stepping at the turn and picking up another sequences after it.

It is in these transitions and turns that exemplary kata performers really stand out.

But there is more to be had there: This is also where very interesting applications come from. Sometimes, applications to kata techniques are to be found best by training across transitions instead of looking at techniques in groups bounded by turns.



Principle 9: Kiai With Confidence

There are two problems with people doing kiai that I have noticed in my years of training. One problem is that they are overly meek or excessively bombastic, and the other is that they use odd noises and vocalizations when performing a kiai.

A solid, loud kiai can really spruce up a mediocre kata performance by someone with limited speed, flexibility, and dynamic range of tension. Since all Shotokan kata are officially considered to have two kiai, the first usually comes around the half-way point. At this point, the onlooker might be quite bored with what he is seeing, but then a strong, confident kiai can really punctuate the performance and make it seem better than it is.

After all, people like to reward someone who believes in himself as opposed to someone who seems meek and unsure. When someone performs on stage and they appear unsure of themselves, their lack of confidence infects the audience as well, and the audience will often become uncomfortable on their behalf. But when someone steps on stage who is very comfortable in their skin, sometimes that can relax the audience enough that even a mediocre performance can seem quite entertaining and refreshing.

After all, people are spectators specifically because they wish to be entertained – diverted away from their everyday worries and cares. If watching your Karate kata becomes a worry, they are not being entertained, but instead suffer with you.

Therefore, show confidence.

And now for the other side of that coin. Showing too much confidence and inappropriate exuberance is equally distasteful. Therefore, I believe a kata performer should remember that his goal is to express confidence without seeming self-indulgent and arrogant. This is a fine line to walk.

The kiai can help express this confidence by being loud and strong. Just be careful not to make a kiai look strained – as if you are trying too hard. There is no need, and it is in fact not in your best interest if your kiai is so powerful that even you appear unable to handle it's mighty sound as your blood vessels bulge and the onlookers begin to wonder if you will survive the next thirty seconds.

Therefore, neither be a geisha girl nor a samurai. Simply be a person who shouts strongly, loudly, and yet calmly at each of the assigned points in the kata. And when you do it, watch what you say!

So many people have taken up the practice of uttering gibberish that sounds like Japanese to them, and yet I do not believe this actually helps anyone to appear as though they are actually Japanese. Anyone who hears these kiai who speaks Japanese will be amused and think less of the kata performer who ends a sequence by yelling, "Onegaishimasu!!!"

Instead, be aware that the Japanese have a few sounds for kiai that they consider acceptable to use. These sounds are safe and will not offend (at least not in Japanese or English):

- Ei! (pronounced like the a in cake)
- Ah! (pronounced like the a in talk)
- Oh! (pronounced like the o in boat)

There are some other noises which I've commonly heard used by people who have never set foot in Japan and haven't trained under a Japanese instructor enough to be corrected away from doing this sort of thing. Some of those noises are:

- Kiai!
- Hassoh! (Pronounced like ah, so)
- Eessah! (pronounced like seesaw)
- Hope! (like the English word)
- Ashoh! (pronounced like tall cove)

These are not great noises for a kiai, in my opinion. The first is inappropriate because you are actually saying the word "kiai." To end a sequence of techniques by shouting the word "shout" in Japanese is not only ironic, it's a little silly if you look at it that way.

The next three noises are made up Japanese-sounding exclamations. I have heard these a lot at certain tournaments. I recommend against Japanese-like noises that may or may not mean things in Japanese when you yell them.

The last noise is something I heard shouted in Japan a lot – usually while I was lying on my back on the floor being destroyed in a sparring match. It means "Total victory!"

The people who yelled that at me were able to defeat me at the time. I don't recommend that you yell that over your opponents in tournaments with Japanese judges. They might not appreciate it. Also, I wouldn't recommend provoking anyone who might become more skilled rather soon and avenge themselves on you in your next match so that they can yell it back.

A good kiai only helps a little, but a bad one can really be harmful to your scores in tournaments and your ability to make friends with other people. Mostly, these sorts of odd-

ball kiai just become obstacles. Kiai with confidence and dignity so that your kiai doesn't become an obstacle to your ability to have someone see the beauty you possess when you express yourself through Karate kata.



Principle 10: Posture of a Model

Kata is a presentation of human beauty and achievement of physical self-control and precision as much as it is a practice for fighting. Some of the mental and physical skills achieved by aspiring kata champions can be played back later as fighting skills if they are pursued to their very limits for accurate and careful movement.

Part of this precise movement is careful control of the posture of the spine, shoulders, neck, and head during all movements. When the body is not vertically aligned, the rotational motions so common to Shotokan practice put stresses on muscles and tendons as they are slung about – like a flat tire spinning on a car.

These extra body motions and "loose parts" also contribute to slower, less explosive motions as the head and neck dip, duck, and swing from side to side during turns, steps and rotations.

Excellent posture is one of the keys to excellent kata and technical practice as well as long-term health and avoidance of neck pain from Karate training.

To achieve this, prevent the head from sitting forward of the body by retracting the chin and raising the head upward toward the sky at the same time, as if a string was pulling the skull upwards by its crown. Pull the shoulders upright without raising them and without over-arching the back such that the chest and upper abdomen are curving forward and sticking out creating further excess tensions and obstacles to smooth, relaxed movement.

Some groups concern themselves greatly with the posture of the lower spine. When we stand up naturally, there is a curve in our spine toward the front of the stomach and then back out to the tail bone. Some people teach that this curve should be removed always in good Shotokan technique by rolling the pelvis so that the tailbone is moved down and the front of the pelvis comes up in front. They refer to this as "tucking the buttocks" or "tucking the hips." I have also heard it as "rolling the pelvis."

I do not like doing that in my Karate practice. I believe it is stressful for the lower back, and that Karate is best practiced with a mobile, relaxed state, not one in which constant flexing and tension is required in order to maintain a stiff, unnatural posture.

I also do not like it because I believe it impedes speed and flexibility of hip motions such as stepping forward and rotating the hips, two of the three most fundamental actions in the Shotokan system.

If you do not agree, then run a 100 yard dash with your pelvis rolled under and you will see how absurd it is to force your body into a posture and hold it that prevents it from being able what it is naturally able to do: Run.

That is not to say, however, that good lower spine posture requires maintaining this curve in the lower spine. Indeed, when stepping forward, I do straighten my spine as the feet come together and then allow the curve to return as I feel this helps me use strong muscles to pull the foot up and make the transition to punching. Likewise, it is impossible to avoid straightening the lower spine when kicking to the front.

Spinal posture is very important for avoiding back pain and injury, and I recommend attempting to maintain a relaxed, vertical posture with the head held high, the shoulders back, the chest and abs relaxed, and the lower back in whatever shape it chooses to take without intervention.

By standing naturally, we allow ourselves natural freedom of movement.



Principle 11: Strong Flexible Stance

Karate stances must be strong as well as flexible, seemingly contrary qualities, if they are to be usable both in combat and in swift, precision movement. While training as beginners, we are taught basic stances as poses we assume in order to practice our techniques. We stand in the stance while our thighs and calves burn in response to the load placed on them while we practice some hand techniques or kicking techniques and either stay fixed in the stance or repeatedly return to it.

Because of this training method, which happens to be highly effective for building the ability to automatically assume the same posture over and over consistently, we come to view stances as the launching platform from which we initiate our techniques.

If we want to reverse punch, we think of assuming a front stance, and then strongly driving off of the rear leg, turning the body, and slinging our punching fist forward from the momentum generated. We come to view our techniques as being fired from a cannon mounted upon a very solid body, as if they were fired from the turret of a battle tank.

Our view of techniques being this way is further reinforced by the pictures we see in Karate books. Men standing in stances appear strong, low to the ground, and ready to spring forward and attack. We view stances as a starting off point for techniques which dig into the ground to support the technique when it lands like the roots of a tree.

From this viewpoint of the stance as a firmly rooted tank body and the upper body as a turret and the hands and feet as shells loaded and fired from a cannon, we have found some after-the-fact justifications for this viewpoint that seem to provide evidence for why it is a good viewpoint. But, really all of this evidence is rationalizing as to why we view our stances this way. It is circular reasoning, and it doesn't really make any sense. In truth, I believe that our stances are not launching and transport mechanisms at all. I take my view from watching two Karate experts spar one another – two real experts, not two 18 year old boys bouncing around wildly trying to tag each other. And, I see nothing rooted, firm, or tank-like about their use of stances at all.

Principle 11: Strong Flexible Stance

While getting ready to launch a technique, and even when retreating and then standing their ground, the very, very best Shotokan sparring champions of old never assume rooted positions and sling their techniques like beginners standing with their thighs burning trying to summon their power from their connection to a firm surface through friction with their bare feet.

To the contrary, they put their weight in the balls of their feet, virtually uprooting themselves, even as they hold a position, and when they move, they move swiftly into stance after stance, not as a launch pad, but as a landing gear.

What I observe, and the way I use stances, is as a landing gear. The body's center of gravity, being propelled forward, sideways, or backward, is far over-extended beyond our ability to use mere strength to recover our balance. The only option we have is to move a foot in the direction of travel and then bend the knee of that leg to catch ourselves.

So, I see stances as being the result of motion, not a posture from which to throw a technique. Never in my long years of Shotokan practice at home or in Japan have I ever seen rooted stances used to launch techniques. But I have always seen people lunge backward and forward with one another, or pivoting around each other, catching themselves with their stances, cushioning the shock by bending a knee.

Thus, my view of Karate stances, while controversial to some, I believe is supported by the observed facts present in the real world. And viewing stances as being my landing gear, they must be strong, because if they are not, they will fail to catch me when I leap forward into an opponent, or quickly move backward, trying to stay just out of range. Only a strong stance can help me remain standing after I grab my opponent and send him to the floor while he grabs and pulls at me attempting to pull me down with him. Only a strong stance can enable me to reverse my retreating body and turn defense into counter-attack.

Far from being rooted, I am using these postures as transitions from one step to the next. It is the steps, shifts, and pivots which are part of the techniques. The stances are simply necessary to finish them out.

Stances must also be flexible for us to move in them. If we engage in "pelvic rolling" or attempt to consciously squeeze our legs toward one another in the futile effort to reinforce the rooted nature of stances which do not work like that anyhow, we reduce our mobility, our ability to rotate, our ability to change direction, and our ability to quickly get out of the way.

Strong. Flexible.

Given these requirements, and our observations of what happens in sparring when we are under pressure, we find that kata enforce some arbitrary rules on stances that make no sense in the real world of combat. Some of these rules have become dogma such that challenging them is akin to screaming that there is no such thing as gravity or that we never really went to the moon.

But the truth is, our rear heel has no actual need to be in contact with the ground. This is a Shotokan "tradition" which is aesthetic (that means it looks nice) but functionless.

Consider pushing a car off of the road after it breaks down. Place both hands on the back of the car. Get low to the ground, plant the balls of your feet, not your heels, and start pushing. It works fine! Now try planting your heel.

You will find it is of no help to you at all.

Likewise, when you throw a reverse punch in place, and you plant your heel to support your punch, it is unnecessary. Hit a heavy bag or a makiwara, and allow the heel to come up. You will find greater reach, more flexibility, and perhaps only temporary unbalance until you accustom yourself to lifting the heel, but no loss of power. You might find even more available.

That's because the rear heel being down does not root your stance in any way.

Look at a stepping punch. As you step forward, the support foot pushes off from the ground. It can push harder and faster if the heel is lifted and the calf is used instead of leaving the support foot "rooted." Take a look at any picture of two very, very advanced and well-respected Shotokan experts sparring. You will never see the heel of the support foot still planted when their techniques land.

Why not?

Because after the pushing action is over and the leg is extended, the energy from the leg is gone, and there is nothing left to root. The body weight's momentum going forward is what supports and carries the punch forward.

The rear heel does nothing after the punch is 75% complete. Thus, with the understanding that my stances are landing gears, that my rear heel being down is not necessarily useful, it becomes obvious that keeping the heel down, for example, is not truly productive and is merely aesthetic.

To all of those who prefer kata practice above all else in Karate, a warning: **Do not allow arbitrary technical rules of performance art interfere with your practice of sparring and self-defense.** While kata provide so many romantic and very functional benefits to the practice of Karate, and while we all enjoy doing them greatly and read books such as this one seeking any possible tidbit of information available that might help us improve, do not allow the technical rules of kata to overrule the practical needs of sparring and self-defense when it does not make sense.

Advanced practitioners should have no problems at all sparring and practicing basic combinations allowing the heel to rise while practicing kata with the heel down. One habit does not necessarily impede the other.

The truth is, I consider myself a kata man. As such, I am always prejudiced against "sparring style" and toward rigid, dogmatic, "kata style" motion. I have to consciously force myself to practice the loose, relaxed, and pragmatic motions of advanced Karate application, so fascinated am I by the aesthetic side of things.

Thus, I give you this warning the same as I issue it to myself. Do not obsess over kata to the detriment of your ability to use your Karate for other purposes. Or, at least do so knowing the consequences and accepting the reality of them.



Principle 12: Precision and Accuracy

With the closing remarks made in the previous principle, this seems like an excellent place to write more on the topic of precision of movement in general. An excellent kata performance requires high levels of precision from the competitor. This principle is a particular skill – the ability to put your body into a particular position exactly where you want it.

Some people refer to this skill as accuracy – the ability to put your knuckles on the spot you are aiming for. Precise movement does indeed depend partially upon your ability to put your strikes at the right height, centered properly, and without over-reaching or over-controlling the extension of your technique.

But there is more to it than that. Precision and accuracy also require that the posture of the entire body be precisely controlled, and that multiple tasks be managed using the mind's natural ability to "chunk" different thought streams into single tasks so that various motions are performed properly without using up a lot of conscious thought.

Consider the opening movement of Heian Shodan. When most people think of moving precisely and with accuracy, they think about where their left fist and foot come to rest at the end of the motion.

But Karate precision is much, much more complex than that. Looking at this finishing position, there are many more considerations than just the foot and hand position. Consider the position of both feet, the width of the stance, the length of the stance, the direction the feet point in, the plumb line of the knees, the degree to which the rear knee is bent, the position of the elbows, how far the wrists are turned, the position of each shoulder vertically and horizontally, and the position of the nose – where is it pointed?

There are perhaps 40 things that a really good diagnostician could possibly check for accuracy and precision on the finished Karate technique of stepping left and performing a downward block, and half of them occur as the body is in motion! This is something that most people do not consider.

When beginning to move, is the head turned as the blocking hands begin to move together to form the chambering posture? Does the body lean or shift to one side instead of simply bursting into motion? What is the position of the arms relative to each other as they are folded to prepare for the block?

The human mind is a serial processor. It only thinks about one thing at a time. People talk about multi-tasking all of the time, but humans truly do not multitask. You are not listening to me while I am talking if you are typing messages on your cell phone or turn away from me to write an email. You are just pretending to listen, or you are doing a bad job at both tasks because you are switching back and forth between them rapidly like a strobe light flashing. The conscious mind only does one thing at a time.

But when you perform a kata, you do many things at the same time because you group tasks into single entities, and then commit them to unconscious motion.

There are many things to think about in a kata that test this ability. The only way to make them accurate and precise while performing them all together is to repeatedly practice again and again, breaking each technique down into the tiniest components possible, and then slowly, over months, putting those components together to create singular techniques and finally complete motions.

Most people do not have the patience for this sort of basic training, but it is the one, stellar contribution of the Japanese who developed Shotokan, particularly in the last 40 years or so, to the practice and performance of Karate.

It is because we practice kata in our study of Karate that we find ourselves so challenged – not to multitask – but to tediously and carefully manage the construction of a subconscious processing system that can take the load away from our conscious minds and allow us the freedom to think about something else while moving properly.



Principle 13: Consistency

Being able to move precisely is important, but equally important is the ability to move consistently. As a kata performer, I am equally concerned with my ability to make my front stance the exact same way with every step as I am with the shape of the stance when I finish a technique and catch my center of gravity.

Consistency of movement is easier to develop than is precision and accuracy. This is to our advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is that our subconscious ability to process movement and remember the order of techniques is quick to develop, thus we experts are able to learn and perhaps even master a kata in less than three months.

The supposed disadvantage is that consistency comes from unconscious habits, and rumor has it that they are hard to break once developed.

I do not believe that. I performed a self-test, which I will not dare to refer to as a scientific experiment, in which I learned a kata called Seisan using a video of a Shito-Ryu expert as a model along with some text I have on the kata. After having performed the kata this way for over a month, I switched gears and changed my performance to that of a Goju-Ryu practitioner as my example, which resulted in substantial changes in performing the kata.

I had no problem making the changes necessary, and within about 100 repetitions over the course of two weeks, I had the new method memorized.

Is this a testament to my Karate genius? Hardly. If I were a Karate genius, this book would be filled of pictures of my brilliant and exceptionally beautiful poses in my Karate uniform instead of being a stream of text.

I was able to do that because it is something that all humans are able to do. My belief is this: contrary to conventional wisdom that old habits are hard to break in Karate training, the more expertise and experience you have, the more you develop the ability to change your habits at will. After learning the 26 kata of Shotokan, changing a kata from

one method to another, or changing a technique so that it is lower instead of higher is not a complicated task.

The Karate expert's mind, trained through the practice of kata, is able to do this sort of mental task easily.



Principle 14: Complete Motion

Perhaps this is more of a sub-principle than a major one, but I believe that emphasis of this point would help all of us. A major principle I personally pursue in my kata is to prioritize completing a movement fully over moving quickly.

The more quickly kata performers try to move, the more that they "short" their techniques by not fully chambering them at the half-way points. I am a firm believer that completion of technique comes first, and speed of movement is only along the performance line of the complete technique – not the result of performing only half of the technique.

Thus, when throwing a double-punch, it is more important that both punches have fully withdrawn elbows before the punch is initiated than it is that the punches have a fast rhythm and pace.

When moving from one technique to another, it is more important that the preparation of the second technique be completely performed than it is that the two techniques be a blurry, impossible to see example of speed.

Kata do look better when performed by someone who can move their limbs quickly. But think about that for a moment, because it means that the kata will look better if the performer can move their limbs fast, not appear to move their limbs fast by shortening movements.

Complete each technique in your kata, and if you need more reason, then look where I looked for inspiration for this: kata application. The chamber of the downward block is not going to be an effective punch and block combination if the chamber is only half completed.

Principle 14: Complete Motion



Principle 15: Breath Control

Many people who practice Karate are very concerned with how to breathe properly. The most basic advice usually says that one should breathe in on a block and out on a punch or kick. A single exhalation should be used for two techniques performed together in succession. During a continuous stream of strikes and kicks, the performer should inhale during pauses and exhale during the techniques.

There is yet another level to this breathing that I believe many subscribe to, and that is inhaling quickly and then exhaling strongly during the motion of a particular kind of technique, and ascribing to each technique in a kata its own particular breathing pattern. Thus, such a Karate expert will always try to memorize the breathing pattern just as he memorizes the rest of the kata – as if the proper pattern to use for breathing were a kata all by itself.

However, eventually I began to come to believe that my breathing does not need to be linked to performance of techniques. Exhaling or inhaling on a block or punch is not really necessary for performance of an excellent kata nor for surviving a fight. Does it help the power of a technique? I have never seen it demonstrated with concrete proof that it does.

I grant that weightlifters grunt when they lift a large amount of weight, and they are coached to exhale, but a punch is not a weightlifting exercise.

Thus, I eventually tried performing my kata while humming a song to myself and therefore decoupled my breathing pattern from the movements of the kata. The result was that I found my movements to become much more natural, fluid, and relaxed, and on top of that, I was far less exhausted at the end of the kata.

I recommend to all to experiment with decoupling the breath from their kata. There is plenty of training in linking them together, but very little or no training in unlinking them so that breathing is natural and relaxed, and thus the body is relaxed during motion.

Try this for your self and see if you like the effects.

Another breathing habit that I am not necessarily married to is the concept of making noisy breaths. Some Karate styles, particularly those with influence from Goju-Ryu, emphasize breathing noisily while contracting the diaphragm so the body feels as though it is being tensed more strongly.

Instead of doing this kind of thing, I think it is more important to train to breath relaxed and yet silently. If breathing is silent and difficult to see, an opponent cannot observe the motions of the body as you breathe and then take advantage of the timing of your breath and hit you at a moment when it would be difficult to react. Breathing silently and invisibly would be quite a skill to develop.

No matter the breathing pattern used, Karate experts all agree that during a kata or a fight, no one wants to be thinking about their breathing. Instead, they need their conscious mind clear to think about other concerns while the subconscious mind breaths in whatever pattern or lack thereof that the expert prefers.

Automate breathing to achieve more success and effectiveness in kata performance.



Principle 16: Swift Feet

While performing kata, the first thing that people tend to look at in the mirror is how fast their hands and feet are moving when blocking, punching, and kicking. Unfortunately, most pay no attention at all to how fast their feet are moving when they are stepping.

The few who do pay attention to stepping quickly tend to focus only on the second half of the step, so that the pushing action of the support foot is fast. But most never look at the first half of a step where the rear foot is brought up to the support foot. And yet this is where speedy, snappy stepping begins.

There are a few secrets to having quick stepping instead of slow, plodding steps in kata.

- Think about how fast you are stepping, particular the first half of the step, while performing kata. Pick a day where you perform all of the kata, and all you do is focus on how fast you begin moving your feet.

- Avoiding pushing off with the rear foot as you lift it to step from a front stance. Instead, simply lift the foot only 1 cm and pull it forward with your body without leaning when you initiate the step. Pushing off with the ball of the foot at the beginning of a step causes a lean. Is this difficult? Practice repeatedly on one side and then the other, build strength, and it will be less difficult.

- Practice stepping while standing waist deep in a swimming pool. This sort of training on a regular basis will speed up your stepping dramatically.

Step quickly and efficiently when performing kata as well as using kata for stepping practice – one practice will feed off the other. Your kata performances, with faster steps, will only be more impressive to watch, and your sparring skills will improve dramatically as well with footwork that is much quicker.

Principle 16: Swift Feet



Principle 17: Know the Line

When performing a kata in a limited space, one skill is of particular use: Knowing the performance line (enbusen). If you are aware of the performance line of your kata, then you can avoid bumping into walls, running out of floor, or stepping into the audience when performing your kata.

I remember watching a particular kata performance where two people were asked to perform different kata side by side. They lined up on the pre-assigned spots marked on the floor. The referee gave the signal for them to begin, and they began stepping around performing their various techniques. Unfortunately, one of them had a kata that swung completely to the left and was going to put him in the middle of the other guy's enbusen.

I watched this and waited, and finally they found themselves in conflict and didn't know what to do. Both froze in place for a moment, waiting for the other guy to move out of the way like a couple of remote-control cars that had run into obstacles.

Finally, one of them shifted over and waited, and the other went through. Then the first guy who moved continued.

I was torn about who should win such a match. In my opinion, the performer should see the enbusen on the floor as it takes his starting point, and imagining where he will be going is a necessary step in any kata performance. Seeing overlap, he should have shifted to the right, so the entire collision was his fault.

But he was also the first to move out of the way, so I wasn't really sure who should win that match. It was very confusing.

Know the performance line and see it in your mind. Adjust your starting place as necessary. Chinte and Sochin need space behind the starting point. Step forward. For Sochin, step to the right and forward, because it goes entirely to the left and behind you.

Gojushiho is very wide (either version), and you will need clearance on both sides or the kata will be a disaster.

Enpi goes to the left and forward, so you could perform it from the back, right corner of a room if you liked.

Know the line. Not knowing the line is not knowing the kata.



Principle 18: Approach Without Concern

This tip is another that is performance art related only, it would seem. Or perhaps it is not?

When approaching the stage to perform your kata, do not run, do not look excited, and instead do everything you can to appear unconcerned about what you are about to do.

When you are "on deck" – usually this is the term used in America for the next person to be called to perform a kata – there is no need to sit like a samurai or stand at attention. I usually relax and do some stretches if I feel like it, or I might just sit down and relax.

When called upon, simply stand up, and walk to the spot where you are to perform, bow, announce the name of the kata, and then assume the natural posture without any tension or special fanfare.

An excellent example of how to do this properly is to watch the man that I think is the greatest kata competitor of all time: Osaka Yoshiharu. He always stepped onto the mat as though he were approaching old friends. And he may have been doing exactly that! Regardless, it is an effective way to enter.

Quiet confidence says to the onlookers, "Watch and learn." Even if it annoys people who think that you should be stiff and running around like some sort of lunatic, they will forget about it completely if you perform a great kata.

This technique works great in tournaments, but there is also a lesson here for the real world.

If you walk without concern, and act unconcerned and polite when someone picks on you or otherwise tries to provoke you into a confrontation, it can be very diffusing. Some people call handling an aggressive person with kind words, humility, and a lack of concern or excitement "Verbal Judo." Emotions are infectious, and if you appear upset,

the other person's state will also become more tense, more pressurized, and more emotional.

Calm emotions also make any sort of performance less difficult – including combat to save your own life. Being completely upset and afraid will sink your ship, but holding yourself together and remaining calm will calm everyone else down and enable you to think more quickly on your feet.

Do not be concerned by an exam or competition in which you are asked to perform a kata. And if you are, do not show it.



Principle 19: Accept Imperfection

While practicing kata, I have noticed that many people become absorbed and obsessed with petty details that will not help their performance while ignoring larger, macro-scale issues that could have provided them with much more training and performance benefit than the things they were concerned with.

For example, when you perform the opening technique of Bassai-Dai, should you lean forward slowly and then lunge, or should you simply lunge forward? As a student, do whatever your instructor says to do. As an expert, do what you like. Either way, no special secret meaning is lost, and doing this or not is not going to save the day on an exam, demonstration, or competition. It's a petty detail.

Having said that, it is important to distinguish between those things that are petty details and those things that are valuable details that repeat throughout your technique and do have the capability of making your kata less beautiful to look at.

Yes, I know. You practice Karate for fighting and don't care about the beauty of your kata… until you feel that stinging sensation in your gut after losing a kata competition to someone with ten years less training than you have. Then, suddenly, it matters, no matter what you might claim later.

A valuable detail is how you angle your sword hand block. The elbow is beautiful at 90°. More or less than that, and it starts to ugly up. I have no idea why this is true, but I have been looking at sword hand blocks my entire life, and 90° angles on the elbow of the blocking arm look best. Don't reach out and do it with a wider angle. I know it might feel like the block is too close, but it is not.

Another valuable detail is the turn on your hand when you perform the block. It's OK to bend the wrist back a little. However, if you bend the wrist from side to side instead of keeping the hand straight such that your middle finger points straight back through the center of your forearm, it's going to be unpleasant to look at.

Some details are petty, and some details are polish. Pay attention to the difference between polish on a technique and petty obsession with whether or not the back fist comes from under the arm or over the shoulder.

How to tell the difference?

I believe that petty details are those things which are performed infrequently and are not part of how to do the same, common technique over and over. Changes to unique motions, such as the hammer fist in Heian Shodan, seem to have much lower impact to your performance than do adjustments to your sword hand block.



Principle 20: Swing the Hips

Usually the word we use in relationship to Shotokan's specialized hip movement is "rotation." However, I find this word, even though I use it myself, a bit inaccurate to describe what is going on when a Shotokan expert uses his hips to propel his techniques. The motion is not truly a rotation.

Rotation suggests that there is a pole in the center of your body, and your hips spin about the pole equally on all sides. But that isn't what happens. In reality, there are two possible axes of rotation in your hips – the ball and socket joints where the femur meets the pelvic girdle.

Ideally, hip motion centers around one of these joints, so that instead of rotating, one hip stays stationary while the other swings around it. Imagine a door on hinges. Baseball players use the same hip rotation when batting and especially when pitching. One foot reaches forward, and the other drives into the ground pushing the hip on that side forward as it swings around the fixed position of the front leg hip socket.

This is difficult to learn. Most people prefer to simply spin their hips, pulling the front one back and turning the rear one forward around some imaginary axis in the middle of their bodies. However, this is not as effective for two reasons:

- The shoulder is not imparted the momentum of as large of a portion of the torso. The part swinging backward doesn't help anything at all.

- The hips do not appear to move as much, and the stance looks less solid as the front knee straightens.

Learning to swing the hips is a visual and functional improvement to your technique. Of course, if you read the section on uniforms back in Principle 1: Dress to Play, then you know that if your jacket is too short, then no matter how much you swing your hips, the tails of your jacket won't do anything, and the onlookers will not perceive it as happening very much. This is why tournament cut uniforms have become so popular.

Learn to swing the hips by standing in front of a wall in a front stance with your big toe and front knee both touching the wall ever so gently. Then perform hip rotation, slowly at first, and do not allow your knee to move either right to left or front to back. Keep it in touch with the same little spot on the wall. You may find that this severely alters the dynamics in your back, legs, and buttocks from the way you usually do it.

It is more difficult, but this is Karate. It isn't supposed to be sloppy and easy.

Swinging the hips quickly and with a snappy action is a fantastic upgrade to make to your technical performance for both appearance's sake and for more effective hip rotation in general.



Principle 21: The Geometry of Bonsai

I think my favorite principle of excellent kata performance is the one that most affects the shape of basic technique postures when they are completed. I call it the Geometry of Bonsai because I learned this tip during my brief and failed attempt to grow and cultivate Bonsai trees.

All of my little trees are dead, but they did not die in vain. Thanks to their sacrifice, I learned that there are certain principles of visual appearance that can be applied to Karate technique as well. There isn't much to it, and you can apply it for immediate results.

A good Bonsai tree is shaped like a triangle when viewed from the front. Have you ever noticed that? A bad Bonsai tree is shaped like a square or a circle and looks uninteresting and silly. But if the Bonsai master sculpts his tree carefully over time so that one branch on one side is lower than the lowest branch on the other side, and the entire tree has a single peak which is not necessarily on center, the tree will take on that famous look to which we are all accustomed.

This triangle shape is universally appealing to the human eye.

That being said, not all Bonsai trees are grown according to this basic principle, and neither will all Karate techniques fit perfectly into this pigeon hole, but the same can be said of why one person's technical performance seems very beautiful and another person's seems ugly.

Some considerations:

- Straight lines are important for beauty. If you curve your fingers instead of making your hands flat or into straight fists, if your wrists are at funny angles when performing a technique like the sword hand block, the visual appearance will be unattractive. Maintain straight lines, and prevent your arms from

wrapping around your body or your hands from curving too much.

- Angles are important. Certain angles are attractive to the human eye, others are not. Generally too shallow or deep of an angle is unattractive. In Karate stances, usually 120, 90, and 45° angles are most attractive.

Unfortunately, this principle is not something that you can necessarily control all of the time. While you can prevent your sword hand block from looking like you have a neurological disorder that causes your hands to cramp, you cannot change the geometry of your body, and that is an important consideration.

Everyone has a unique shape, and some people are more symmetrical than others. Pay attention at the next kata competition you watch, and note the physical attractiveness and proportions of the competitors and how well they place.

What little is in your control, take a look at it in the mirror and rearrange things the same way a Bonsai master does. Preen and prune your technique like a Bonsai tree, making small adjustments to move elbows and knees around so that techniques are straight instead of appearing bent or crooked.

Geometry is all that exists when you finish a movement and pause for a second before proceeding to the next technique.



Principle 22: Nail the Climax

Every kata is like a story. It has a beginning, middle, and end. If we look at stories, we see that the end of the story is not the place where the story climaxes. Rather, the story's peak moment is usually near the end, but more material will follow the major conclusion of the story. Very few stories end on a single high note. Most have a dénouement, the ending lines of the story following the climax that explain how everything turned out after a surprising revelation.

Kata are much the same. Usually the last technique is not the climax of the kata. If you are going to impress with your kata performance, find this moment in your kata when everything comes to a head, and make sure that you nail that section on the nose and do not make any mistakes there.

Some of the climactic moments in Shotokan kata:

Heian Shodan: The last punch.
Heian Nidan: The double armed block
Heian Sandan: The sequence spear hand, bottom fist, punch.
Heian Yondan: The sword hand strike, kick, and strike.
Heian Godan: The Jump
Tekki Shodan: None
Tekki Nidan: None
Tekki Sandan: None
Bassai-Dai: The portion leading up to the elbow strike and three downward blocks
Kanku-Dai: The portion leading up to the duck
Jion: The section leading up to the inside block punch sequences.
Enpi: The portion leading up to and including the jump
Hangetsu: None
Gankaku: the elbow strike and spin
Jutte: the three mountain blocks
Bassai-Sho: The portion leading up to the punch

Kanku-Sho: The portion leading up to and including the jump and standing up from it.
Chinte: the portion leading up to and including the double punch.
Unsu: There are two – the four punches near the beginning, and the jump at the end.
Sochin: The turn, kick, stomp, and block after the first kiai.
Nijushiho: the kicks and punches
Gojushiho (both versions): the kick and the following few techniques.
Meikyo: The jump
Wankan: none
Jiin: The part with the kick, two punches, and double block (both of them)

How did I find out about these? I picked the places out myself. This is not something "official" that someone taught me. I look at the 26 kata and I see 26 stories. Some of them are written very well (Unsu), and some of them are written badly (Hangetsu) from the perspective of a story teller.

Unsu is popular in tournaments because it wins. I believe it wins because it tells a story and is therefore fun to watch. It has an introduction, a flurry of action, a slow moment for you to calm down while watching it, and then it builds up to the jumping technique, and from that crescendo it recedes until the last technique.

Some other kata are likewise fun to watch. But, the Tekki are not. They look like pushups or calisthenics by comparison to other kata. I believe that is because there is no climactic moment in those kata. They are overly symmetrical with uninteresting rhythm and not enough performance art in them to make them interesting to watch.

They may provide some interesting training, but they do not provide interesting watching. Hangetsu is likewise handicapped and does not have a moment in it when the performer has increased the level of drama. Wankan is similarly weak on story telling.

This is just my perspective, but if you want to win in competition, pick a kata that tells a story, and then tell that story well, making sure that at the moment of truth, you nail whatever it is you were supposed to nail, impress your audience, and from there everything winds down a bit.



Principle 23: Start Clean and Finish Strong

The last principle for successful kata performance I have to share is number 23 – start clean and finish strong. The first few techniques of a kata tell the referees and onlookers how good you are at Karate more than anything else you do.

Make sure that those first few techniques are very clean and precise. If you can move quickly through combined techniques while also being precise, good for you, do that. If not, keep it clean. Speed during the first few techniques is rarely remembered. Speed and precise movement are more valued at the climax of the kata, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Finish strongly as well. Note that the last technique of the kata will pause for a moment because it is the last technique. Your posture, your appearance, and how you execute that last technique is like the page in a book where the words The End appear.

Make sure that technique is very strong, and that it has everything you have to give.

A famous sprinter once said that his secret to winning was to run not for the finish line, but for a finish line 10 yards past it. You too must strive to perform not just to the end of your kata where you collapse, but beyond it.

One secret of building this ability is to perform your kata two times in a row on a regular basis to build endurance.

Start clean and finish strong, nail the climax, and do the other things recommended here, and your kata performance will improve not just for your onlookers, but also as a training mechanism.



Heian

Hei means flat, even, level, calm, ordinary, and peaceful. **An** means safe, stable, easy, peaceful, or inexpensive. The word **Heian** therefore refers to a concept that combines the two meanings above into a single concept. "Peaceful" is likely. "Basic" is another possible interpretation if we consider the meanings "ordinary" and "easy." No matter the interpretation of the name's meaning from the two kanji, the concept of Heian as safe, easy, and unchallenging is obvious.

For this kata, "Peaceful Mind" is a popular translation, but technically, it is incorrect. It is possible that one can assume that the word Heian refers not only to the state of the kata as safe and easy, but also to the state of the mind of the performer of any karate kata as peaceful. However, it is not possible to interpret the word Heian to mean Peaceful Mind. Neither of the characters refers to "mind". It must be irresistible for some people to add a little creative flair to the name of the kata to further the mystique of these simple kata.

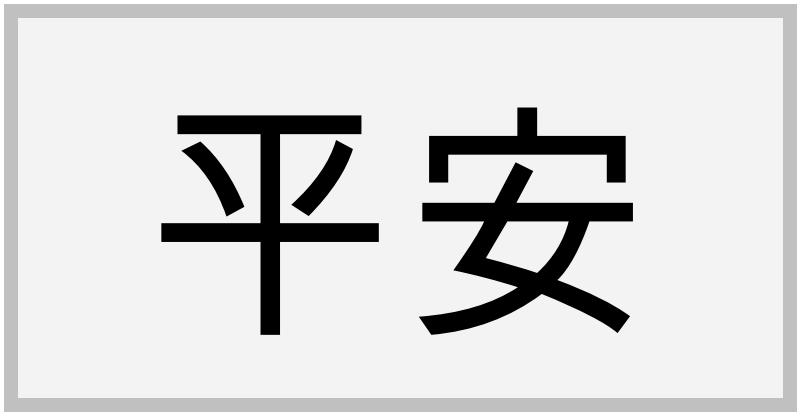
One explanation for the name of this kata I have read says that the name comes from the Japanese word **heiwa-antei** which means peace and stability. That is probably not the case, because the kata were not even originally named Heian. In fact, the name Heian comes from the Okinawan name for the kata - Pinan. Pinan is the Okinawan pronunciation of the same two characters. In fact, in Funakoshi's first book, he referred to these kata as the Pinan – not as the Heian. The name Heian came from Funakoshi's efforts to take the Okinawa out of his karate in order to make it more acceptable to the Japanese during the war. Therefore, I think it is very unlikely that a Japanese pronounced word is the source of the name Heian. I believe he simply pronounced the original Pinan kanji in Tokyo's dialect of Japanese.

Another popular myth is that the name of the kata refers to the fact that all five of the Heian begin with blocks instead of attacks. But, having a blocking action as the first technique is not a unique trait for a Shotokan kata.

If we consider the work of Elmar Schmeisser, then we have to concede that it is possible that the opening techniques of every kata, including the Heian, are simultaneously striking and parrying actions. Those opening techniques, according to Schmeisser's Rules are actually attacks, not purely defensive motions as so many people assume.

Thus, I conclude that the name Pinan was given to these kata because they were considered to be relatively easy.

There are five Heian kata. They are respectively known as Heian Shodan, Heian Nidan, Heian Sandan, Heian Yondan, and Heian Godan. Each of these name tags means first



Kanji for "Heian." These same kanji say "Pinan" on Okinawa. Flip the first character upside down and you can see the performance list for most of the Heian kata.

level, second level, etc.

How Difficult are the Heian?

Common thinking about the Heian kata is that they are basic kata, easy kata, and therefore targeted at beginning students. Students typically learn Heian Shodan before they learn any other kata, unless the instructor has an affinity for the rapidly disappearing Taikyoku kata. However, when we analyze the movements in the Heian, we find that the techniques, motions, rhythms, and other demands placed on the karate student are equal to any challenges found in Bassai-Dai, Kanku-Dai, Jion, or any other kata. The only difference is that the Heian kata are short - topping out at 22 techniques. However, performed one after another, they total about 108 techniques, as long as any Tai Chi long form or the longest known kata in karate: Suparinpei.

So, why do we consider these kata less difficult than the others? I think the concept of one kata being more difficult than another is unfounded. Heian are not less difficult. They contain all of the challenges that a karate student will face later on when learning supposedly more advanced kata. The idea of relative kata difficulty is probably in our minds, not inherent in the kata. After all, before these kata existed in the 19th Century,

the kata we think of as advanced were used to teach Karate, and people seemed to learn the kata just fine. The first kata learned might be one that we considered to be extremely advanced today, or even more basic than the Heian.

Who created the Heian?
Thanks to the tendency of Itosu, Funakoshi, and other karate experts from Okinawa to not keep any sort of journal or diary, we have no idea where the Heian come from. We know that the Heian were originally called Pinan on Okinawa. We know that they are not unique to the Shotokan system, so that means that Funakoshi did not create these kata. We know that other styles of the Shorin-Ryu legacy practice them, so they must have been created before karate was brought to Japan.

One legend says that the Pinan were created by Itosu Yasutsune of Shuri City, Okinawa circa 1905. Supposedly, he created these five kata specifically for the purpose of teaching karate in public high schools. Having experienced difficulty teaching children in a large class, Itosu is said to have hoped to simplify the process of teaching Passai (Bassai-Dai) and Kushanku (Kanku-Dai) by creating the Pinan kata to simplify the process. Itosu allegedly took techniques from Passai and Kushanku and compounded them in increasing order of difficulty to create the Pinan. And supposedly the smaller kata served as introductory kata that endowed the high school students with the skills they needed to take on more difficult kata later on - much the way we use the Heian in a modern Shotokan curriculum today.

We don't know that Itosu created the Heian. The books that make this claim cite no documents to support the story, and the authors that have published this present no evidence of much of anything Itosu did. Most of what we know about Itosu is oral history and stories from grouchy old men who also claim that Funakoshi could disappear and reappear at will. So, we know practically nothing about Itosu.

Elmar Schmeisser presents a different hypothesis. He says that the origin of the Pinan is two kata known as Channan. Supposedly this pair of kata is much more ancient than the five Pinan. One Channan apparently looks like three of the Pinan spliced together, while the other looks like the remaining two Pinan spliced together. The Pinan could be these two kata broken apart to make them more easily studied.

Did Itosu take these two old kata and break them into five smaller kata? Or, did Itosu take some other, large kata, and from it create the Channan for himself? Did he at some point become unsatisfied with his Channan and then decide to further reduce the two kata into the five Pinan? Maybe he created the Channan from scratch, or perhaps he was trying to piece together other kata. Perhaps Channan is what the mythical Kushanku brought with him from China to Okinawa and Itosu did nothing more than pass on what he learned. Some claim that there was a Chinese diplomat named Chiang An who brought this kata to Okinawa. The jury is still out on that, as others say that the name is that of a city in China which used to be the capital.

We don't know who created this kata specifically, but we can speculate, and it is fun to do so and quite harmless.

No one ever improved their Karate training by knowing for a fact the history of the kata they were learning.

Heian Shodan <-> Heian Nidan
Did you know that originally Heian Nidan was the first Heian kata? If you visit a Shito-Ryu school, and you ask them to perform Pinan Shodan, they will perform Heian Nidan!

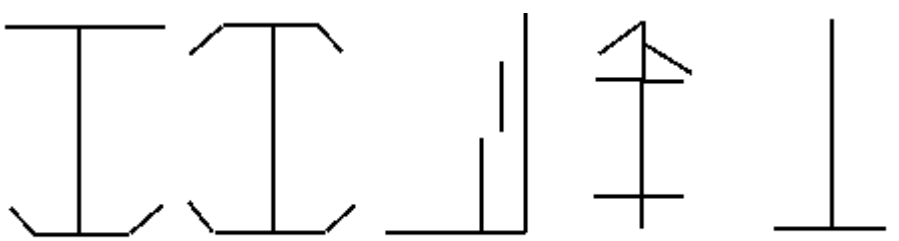
At some point in the 1930's, Funakoshi Gichin apparently changed the name of Heian Nidan to Heian Shodan and changed Heian Shodan to Heian Nidan, transposing the names of these two kata so that they would be learned in the reverse order from their previous arrangement. The reason for this change is unclear today. Since the founder of Wado Ryu, Otsuka Hinori, had practiced Shotokan Karate under Funakoshi for a couple of years, his Wado Ryu style still practices the Heian kata under the name Pinan. The first and second of the kata are still reversed from the modern Shotokan ordering. The Shito-Ryu style also maintains this ordering, since it is closer to the original Okinawan Toh-te than modern day Shotokan.

One author has claimed that Itosu's writings state that the Heian kata were gymnastic in nature and not really intended to pass on any secret fighting techniques or specific combat strategy. However, I have never seen any writings by Itosu published by anyone in any language, so I cannot comment on that.

And, I don't think I need to. I believe that the intended purpose of the kata that the creators have is largely irrelevant to me today. I am more interested in my purpose for learning and practicing them than I am in what someone who lived a hundred years ago wanted me to get from them.

Heian Enbusen
There are a couple of ink blot patterns in the enbusen of the Heian kata that are worth noticing. Some see archery equipment, and others see kanji.

When viewing the performance line of the Heian, each of the enbusen seems to be the image of a different piece of archery equipment. Each looks like an arrow, a bow, a target or something similar. Since the modern Shotokan kata utilize slightly different angles and stances from the original patterns that they followed prior to the 1930's and 1940's, this is no longer as apparent from the Heian of Shotokan as it would have been 100 years ago when they were still referred to only as Pinan. Some have written that Itosu was a great lover of Kyudo, Japanese ritual archery, and that he apparently shaped the kata in such a way that they would describe implements from that art.



It is also rumored that if you lay certain of the Heian enbusen on top of each other, they almost look like the kanji for Heian. What's even more interesting is that the two diagonal lines in the character for Hei used to be written pointed outward rather than inward. Comparing the performance line to the original way of writing this character makes the lines of the kata fit the shape almost perfectly.

Are we seeing patterns that have hidden messages to us in the enbusen, or are we playing ink blots with patterns on the floor? Are we violating Mark Twain's invocation to avoid reading too much into an author's work? Perhaps.

Heian as Elementals

There is also some speculation as to why there are five Heian kata rather than four or six. Apparently there is a belief held by some that the five elements of ancient Japanese belief are the reasoning. The famous book by Musashi Miyamoto, ***Gorin no sho***, *A Book of Five Rings*, is divided into five chapters, each of which is named after an element. The Ground, Water, Fire, Wind, and Void are the elements used for the title of each new book, or "ring."

Supposedly the Heian Shodan is very rooted to the ground, therefore it is the Ground kata. Nidan is more flowing, and less choppy and blocky - the Water kata. Sandan is less like technique practice and more like fighting - the Fire Kata. Yondan contains more kicking and other air techniques - the Air kata. Godan contains a movement where the performer jumps into the air - the Void.

One problem with this metaphor is that it didn't hold any water, air, fire, or dirt until Funakoshi rearranged the Heian so that the Ground kata was conveniently located in the front.

Another problem with this metaphor is that “Void” was never really considered an element. The missing element here is wood. There is no wood chapter in Musashi’s book.

I am not a big fan of this metaphor and do not see any value in thinking of the kata this way. All of them contain techniques which should be performed in largely the same way: As quickly, precisely, and powerfully as possible to an excellent rhythm with a quality pace.

Heian



Heian Shodan

Originally the second of the five kata, this is now practiced as the first by most novice students in modern Shotokan Karate clubs. Heian Shodan is distinguished by its use of the down block, the upper block, the middle level stepping punch, the sword hand block, and the fact that every technique takes one step to complete. A mystery is why the wrist release motion made after the second down block is not mirrored on the other side. All of the other techniques are generally taught to students within weeks of beginning lessons in karate.

The purpose of this kata is to teach the student basic stepping in a front stance and back

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Heian Shodan

stance, to teach the application of stepping punches following blocks which remove any obstructing limbs, and the use of blocking as attacking.

Heian Shodan is generally best introduced to students after they have completed a 2 month long sequence of training in the basic techniques. They should be familiar with the concepts of the individual hand and foot motions, the three basic stances, the basic

kicking techniques, and the processes involved in advancing, retreating, and turning the body about in a stable fashion. Generally students are passed on this kata on their first exam if they can remember and replicate the basic techniques with any accuracy at all. Some examiners even allow the candidate for 8th kyu to perform this kata to a count.
Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Begin the kata with your hands relaxed at your sides in fists. Your feet should be about as far apart as your hips are wide as measured from the inside of your feet.

2. **Down Block** - Look left before you do anything. As a general rule in every kata, look before you start to move in any new direction with a snappy head turn, and ensure the face is fully pointing in the direction you are about to move. Step out to the left with the left foot into a front stance. The stance should be about 12 to 14 inches wide when measured from the most inside portion of one foot to the other. The hips are already to the side because of the angle of your motion, so you don't really have to turn them. Some people make an extra motion of trying to turn their hips forward so that they can snap them to the side again, but this is unnecessary. This technique really doesn't harness the hips very much. When you fold the arms for the block, you should bend your knees just a little - not too much - before stepping out with the left foot. Whatever you do, do not lean forward or bend over forward and then expand back out to good posture as you step out. Keep your posture vertical.

3. **Stepping Punch** - Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. Punch middle level. The punch should focus when the foot touches the floor and should be relaxed by the time the stance settles. There will be vibration in the stance after the foot hits the floor that will take a brief moment to dissipate. You focus during this time. Keep the hips squarely to the front throughout the step. Do not try to cock the hip back and then wiggle the pelvis on impact in an attempt to create any vibration. Vibrations happen on their own. Simply drive forward and keep the hips as square to the front as you can, and you'll end up doing the motion most efficiently.

4. **Down Block** - Turn 180° to the rear looking over the right shoulder. Step the right foot back to the left without leaning forward, fold the arms for the down block as you pivot clockwise, and then unfold them in a burst to perform the block as you continue to pivot to the right performing the down block. You should finish in a front stance with the right foot forward.

   I do not recommend turning the way Kanazawa demonstrates in his Karate Kata books. He reaches back with his foot, as if testing the temperature of the water and then pivots on both feet. By doing this, he leans forward and away from the turn, and he ends up fouling not only the beauty of the kata but also the speed and efficiency of the turning action. Instead, on any turn, bring the feet together as you pivot on one foot, never lean, and then step out in the direction of the next technique.

   This should all be performed in one fluid motion without a pause when the feet are brought together.

5. **Vertical Bottom Fist Strike** - This is the only technique that keeps this kata from being completely symmetrical. From the down block position, raise the right fist overhead by passing it past the left ear and then over the crown of the head in a vertical fashion. As you pull back the fist, you should retract your front front foot half-way back to the left foot. Shuffle the foot back into place again while you strike downward to your own mouth height. You should finish with your elbow at a 90° angle.

   There are several points of contention here for many people. Some schools prefer to do this technique the older way: They pull the foot back as they strike and not shift back forward again. Shotokan schools avoid this style of motion for one reason: it prevents the kata from returning to the same spot.

   Others prefer not to have the elbow bent on contact, and instead extend the arm straight out at the completion of the strike. While studying kata, keep in mind that such details are petty concerns which ultimately will not affect what you learn from them, will not impact whether or not you pass tests for new ranks, nor will they affect your success in competitions. It is the overall performance that wins, loses, passes, fails, and teaches. An elbow being bent this way or that on a single technique that no one agrees on is truly left up to the performer to manage.

   Should the hips be to the side or to the front during this technique? The hips should be to the side. Strikes performed with one hand on the lead leg side that are not punches are generally performed in the half-front facing position.

   There should be no reaching with the left hand in order to make a draw hand. Just leave the left hand where it is on the side of the hip as you perform this action.

6. **Stepping Punch** - Step forward with the left foot and punch middle level. There is often disagreement about what constitutes middle level punching. Some people prefer to punch directly in front of their own solar plexus (the place where the tip of the sternum ends). Others prefer to punch more toward the middle of the sternum so that the arm is parallel to the floor. And yet others punch in front of the shoulder. Each instructor seems to have his preference. Over the long term, as you advance, remember that these air techniques have only imaginary targets, and punching consistently in any position during a kata will not affect your ability to punch a real target located somewhere else. It is up to the performer to choose.

7. **Turn and Down Block** - Look left 90° and bring the left foot in to the right as you fold for a down block. Step out to the left into a front stance with the left foot and down block strongly.

8. **Upper Level Rising Blocks** - Raise the left hand open in front of the forehead in the same shape as an upper level rising block. Keep the elbow at 90°. Step forward, and trade the hands, upper level rising blocking with the right hand in a fist synchronized with the turning of the hips to the side.

Open the right hand, and then step forward and block again with the left. Repeat again with another step on the right side and let out a kiai. The hips are turned to the side on each block. Try to step forward, bring the hips to square as the feet pass, and then leave the hips there until you move the arm. Try not to gradually unfold the hips as you step forward, but rather burst them to the side at the end of the step.

9. **Down Block** - Turn 270° counter-clockwise with the feet close together as above, and then step out with the left foot into a down block.

10. **Stepping Punch** - Step forward with the right foot and punch middle level with the hips square.

11. **Down Block** - Turn 180° to the right as before, and down block.

12. **Stepping Punch** - Step forward with the left foot into a front stance and punch middle level.

13. **Down Block** - Turn 90° to the left, as before, and down block.

14. **Stepping punches** - Step forward and punch middle level. Again. And again for a total of three. The timing of these three techniques, and the three upper level rising blocks, can be either 1--2--3 or 1---2-3. It's your choice. Tournament competitors usually use the second timing. People who prefer their kata more old fashioned tend to use the first. Keep the hips square during all three of these techniques. Don't wiggle them or otherwise try to artificially induce hip motion. The power behind the punch is the stepping action driving the hips forward.

15. **Turn and Sword Hand Block** - Turn 270° as before with the feet close together. Step out into a left back stance and sword hand block middle level with the left hand.

    This will work well for you if you avoid the biggest pitfall in performing this technique – allowing the back to curve to the side so that the hips are not directly under the torso, but instead are tilted with the front leg side higher than the rear leg side. Correcting this will create a truly beautiful back stance that you will be proud to display.

16. **Sword Hand Block** - Step forward and to the right 45° angle with the right foot. Pass the foot close to the left foot as you step. Block with the right hand. Try to wait to turn the hips to the side until the very end of the technique. Remember that sword hand blocks, as almost all basic blocks, contain a strict folding, chambering, or stacking action before the block itself is thrown. These actions have particular meanings, and should not be skipped or looked at lightly. To improve the speed of your blocking, snap the folding action rather than performing your blocks in a slower, two motion sort of way. Be careful that you do not short the motion in an attempt to go faster. Always throw your techniques as fast as you can using the strictest and longest motion.

    The trick is to step quickly. During basic technique training, allow the hands and

the feet to race one another. The hands will always win, but the faster you move your hands, the faster your feet will move. And the reverse is true, so try to step very quickly, and make your sword hand techniques a single, snapping motion instead of reaching, stepping, and then blocking in a plodding, slow kind of way.

17. **Sword Hand Block** - Turn 135 degrees to the right and sword hand block with the right hand again. Because of the way you will perform this, turning your hips out to the side explosively will be impossible. Don't try to force it. Instead, harness the turning of the shoulders in the direction of the block. This is a different sort of leveraging of the body from the last block.

18. **Sword Hand Block** - Step with the left foot to the 45° angle to the left into another sword hand block. Perform as in 2 moves prior.

19. **Finish** - Stand back up into the natural stance by withdrawing the front leg back to the support foot. Do not push off with the front foot. Lift it and withdraw it back in. Do not lean to withdraw it. This requires some skill to do.

Heian Shodan



Heian Nidan

The second of the Heian kata was originally taught as the first. Heian Shodan and Heian Nidan have traded names, and now the one with large down block and punching actions taught before this kata. However, when they were created, and even today in Shito-Ryu and Okinawan Karate systems, this is Pinan Shodan, not Heian Nidan.

The connection with Kanku-Dai, even without analysis by experts, is readily apparent from the entire first half of the kata, since Heian Nidan mimics Kanku-Dai almost

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Heian Nidan

exactly. In fact, the resemblance is so strong that even long time experts and masters frequently confuse the two kata and change from one kata to the other without thinking right in the middle of national tournament performances both in Japan and in the West.

Heian Nidan

Heian Nidan's content of large scale use of sword hand techniques, spear hands, reverse-side blocking, and kicking distinguishes it from the other Heian kata. This kata is usually considered more difficult for students to grasp than Heian Shodan. Whether or not that is why Funakoshi re-ordered the first two Heian kata or not is unclear. It is possible that Heian Nidan is considered more difficult today simply because of modern teaching methods being so different from what they once were on Okinawa. One thing is certain, the relative difficulty of kata is largely a function of the opinions of the people performing it, not the techniques of the kata.

Heian Nidan may be simple and easy to break down into its essential content, but within it can be found some very effective techniques and maneuvers. The opening movements are interesting joint attacks aimed at the opponent's elbows. The spear hand technique demonstrates the use of simultaneous blocking and attacking. The side snap kick and back fist performed early in the kata are other examples of the tactic. The kata also includes reverse side blocking techniques in its second half. Some instructors interpret these techniques as elbow locks performed against the opponent's attacking arm. The final four techniques are more examples of blocking as attacking. The down blocks are sometimes interpreted as strikes to the opponents groin while using subtle footwork to avoid the attacker's technique. While teaching basic postures and turning, Heian Nidan also provides training in many combat ready sequences of techniques.

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Begin the kata with your hands relaxed at your sides in fists. Your feet should be about as far apart as your hips are wide. Here's a tip for putting the feet at the right width the Goju-Ryu people use: stand with your heels together and your toes pointed outward. Now move your heels out by pivoting on the balls of both feet, and then straighten your feet. That is a good width to use.

2. **Two Handed Block** - Step out with the left foot into a back stance. Do not move the torso to the left. Instead, just lower the torso straight down as you bend the knees and move the left foot out into position. The feeling should be one of compressing the right leg downward by bending the knee.

   Bring both fists by the right waist in no particular position, and then snap them up and around strongly. The left arm performs a high level inside block with the back of the fist. The right arm performs an upper level rising block. The forearm and fist of the right arm point forward in the same direction as the toes of your right foot, and the left arm should be pointed upward directly.

   The knuckles of the right hand should point at the height of the left wrist. The forearms should be about 8 inches apart so that your face will fit between them. The wrists of both arms must be perfectly straight. The left elbow is at a perfect 90° angle as is the left shoulder. The right shoulder should be at 45°, and the right elbow should be at around 100 to 110 degrees.

   When finished, this technique forms a nice rectangle between the arms when viewed from the front of the room. When viewed from the side, the arms are far

enough apart that the face is between them and has an unobstructed view forward.

3. **Crossed Arms Strike** - Pull the left arm down so that the left fist finishes in a vertical position next to the right ear. The right fist should strike in an outward arc so that the bottom fist strikes the to the chest level. The technique should finish so that the elbows are pressed together.

4. **Bottom Fist Strike** - Unfold the arms and draw the right arm back to the waist strongly. Bottom fist strike to your own shoulder height with the left arm. The timing of these three techniques is 1---2-3.

5. **Repeat** - Shift the weight to the left and face the right so that the left foot becomes the rear foot in a right back stance. Repeat the above techniques of the blocks and strikes with the same timing.

6. **Triangle Side Snap Kick** - Step halfway up to the right foot with the left. Do not step directly to the foot, but rather step out in front of the line of your stance by about one foot so that your left foot sets down upon what would be the top of a triangle formed by that point and the two footing places in your previous back stance. At the same time, bring the right fist back so that it sits vertically over the left fist in what is commonly called a cup and saucer position. The right foot should come up to the knee, sole pointing upward, with the blade edge of the foot pointing at and brushing against the inside of the knee.

   Snap a side kick outward and upward and then back to the knee with a strong contraction when the foot returns to the knee. At the same time, back fist with a snap and bring the fist back to the right breast when finished. Both techniques snap at the same time. Be careful not to lean back or forward when throwing these techniques. You should be fully side facing.

7. **Sword Hand Block** - Step down so that the right foot becomes the rear foot in a back stance with the left hand blocking in a sword hand block. Fold the arms strongly for the block with a snapping action as the foot moves down and the head turns 180° to the left. The block should focus with the step of the foot.

8. **Sword Hand Block** - Step forward with the right foot into another back stance. Sword hand block with the right hand.

9. **Sword Hand Block** -Step and sword hand block again with the left hand.

10. **Spear Hand** - Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. As you step, stab the right hand forward to the middle level with a four finger spear hand stab. The left hand should fold palm downward and finish so that the right elbow sits on the back of the left hand. The left arm and right arms should form a perfect rectangle between them. Don't bend the left wrist. Kiai on this technique and remember it. The last five techniques will come back to haunt you in Kanku Dai.

11. **Turn and Sword Hand Block** - Turn 270° as before with the feet close together. Step out into a left back stance and sword hand block middle level with the left hand.

12. **Sword Hand Block** - Step forward and to the right 45° angle with the right foot. Pass the foot close to the left foot as you step. Block with the right hand. Try to wait to turn the hips to the side until the very end of the technique. Remember that sword hand blocks, as almost all basic blocks, contain a strict folding, chambering, or stacking action before the block itself is thrown. These actions have particular meanings, and should not be skipped or looked at lightly. To improve the speed of your blocking, snap the folding action rather than performing your blocks in a 1-2 sort of way. Be careful that you do not short the motion in an attempt to go faster. Always throw your techniques as fast as you can and use the strictest and longest motion.

13. **Sword Hand Block** - Turn 135 degrees to the right and sword hand block with the right hand again. Because of the way you will perform this, turning your hips out to the side explosively will be impossible. Don't try to force it. Instead, harness the turning of the shoulders in the direction of the block. This is a different sort of leveraging of the body from the last block.

14. **Sword Hand Block** - Step with the left foot to the 45° angle to the left into another sword hand block. Perform as in 2 moves prior.

15. **Reverse Inside Block** - Remember this technique, because you'll need it later when you try to perform Bassai Dai. Shift the left foot over to the left about 45° to form a new front stance. Fold the arms for a right inside block, but keep the hips half-facing as you fold the arms. Most people make the mistake of folding the arms and turning the hips forward before they actually start the blocking action. Pay attention to when you turn the hips during your block. Don't think on a macro level block=hip turn. Think about each piece of the block and each piece of the hip turning action.

    Once the foot settles into place, reverse inside block with the right hand, turning the hips strongly to the reverse half-facing position. No, you can't really make your pelvis aim 45° in the other direction. The best you can do is get it to squarely face the target. You'll have to turn your shoulders and twist your spine past the point that your hips will turn. You will learn, as you progress through karate training, that whether to keep the shoulders synchronized and fixed to the motion of the pelvis will be a conditional thing that changes depending on the conditions you are in and the technique you are performing. In this case, the shoulders go past the point where the hips turn. When you throw reverse punches, doing so is considered a big, fat no-no.

    As you perform this block, there will be several side-effects. The first is that your front knee will want to straighten, because in order to twist up this much, you really need a higher, shorter stance. The usual solution by most kata champions is to pull the front foot back about six inches without straightening the knee.

Another side effect is that when you try to rotate to the reverse half-facing posture, you can't, so you end up pushing your hips away from the rear leg of the stance to the side. Be careful to keep the pelvis in front of that support leg. You'll have to actively push it into position until a few years of training go by.

16. **Front snap kick** - Leaving the arms in position, step forward and front snap kick with the right leg to the middle level. Some people get a little excited that they are kicking, and they like to try to kick ot the high level. Don't do that. The kata clearly calls for middle level kicking, and the challenge is more on your accuracy and consistency rather than athletic ability.

17. **Reverse Punch** - Reverse punch so that the punch focuses as your foot hits the floor in another front stance. You should be fully front-facing throughout the kick. Some people like to try to get hip rotation into their front snap kicks, but it is not productive. The rotation would necessarily occur when the knee was being lifted, and that action has very little to do with the resulting kick at that point. Keep the hips square, and in fact, you should try to push the hip of the support leg forward when you perform a front snap kick.

18. **Repeat** - Fold your arms for another inside block, and reverse side inside block with the mirror image of the three techniques you just performed. Finish with a left snap kick and a right reverse punch.

19. **Double Hand Block** - Step forward into a new front stance with the hips to the side with the right foot. Fold for a double hand block by putting the right fist in front of the left shoulder and the left fist touching the right elbow. Block as the foot settles in as the front foot of a right side front stance.

20. **Down Block** - Turn 270° counter-clockwise with the feet close together as above, and then step out with the left foot into a down block.

21. **Upper Block Stepping Punch** Step to the 45° angle with the right foot, and right side upper block in front stance. Do this by reaching with the left open hand over your forehead directly from the down block posture of the hand. Then throw an upper level rising block with the right hand as you rotate the hips to the side and step forward.

22. **Down Block** - Turn 135 degrees clockwise with the feet close together as above, and then step out with the right foot into a down block.

23. **Upper Block Stepping Punch** Step to the 45° angle with the left foot, and left side upper block in front stance. Do this by reaching with the right open hand over your forehead directly from the down block posture of the hand. Then throw an upper level rising block with the left hand as you rotate the hips to the side and step forward. Kiai on this technique.

24. **Finish** - Step back with the left foot to the natural position. The right foot is already there, but will need to be straightened up a little. Relax the arms at the sides.

Heian Nidan



Heian Sandan

The third Heian kata is the strangest of all of the basic kata, excluding the Tekki. Within Heian Sandan are bizarre and difficult to apply techniques ranging from the most simple to very complicated turning maneuvers. The kata contains many drastic and choppy changes in strategy, posture, and execution. Clearly Heian Sandan training is designed to impart an understanding of complicated turning and footwork as well as close distance fighting techniques. Heian Sandan is not as physically taxing as either Heian Nidan or

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Heian Sandan

Heian Shodan. The small scale techniques it contains seem to draw more upon the brain power of the Karate expert rather than physical strength and endurance.

Some of these dramatic changes in technique from one area to another are indicative of the kata having been edited by someone upstream of modern karate, possible Itosu himself.

Of particular interest are the techniques 12, 13, and 14. Many schools interpret the stomping kicks as crescent kicks designed to block the oncoming techniques of an attacker. However, this interpretation is largely in the West, where a simple knee raise is quickly interpreted to be a flashy and high level kicking technique. Either interpretation is just as valid as the other. Japanese instructors of high rank often have difficulty agreeing upon what exactly these techniques are when the subject comes up. Shito-Ryu versions of this kata usually have no foot lift at all. The performer merely steps through each technique.

Most Karate enthusiasts seem to dislike either Heian Sandan or Heian Yondan more than the others. Heian Sandan in particular seems to fail to convey a sense of fluidity of movement, and is perhaps more poorly constructed than the other Heian. The enbusen of Heian Sandan is a bit out of synch with the rest of the Heian kata.

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Begin the kata with your hands relaxed at your sides in fists. Your feet should be about as far apart as your hips are wide.

2. **Inside Block** - Step out with the left foot into a back stance. Do not move the torso to the left. Instead, just lower the torso straight down as you bend the knees and move the left foot out into position. Fold for a left inside block as you step out, and then focus the block in time with the foot stepping down.

3. **Cross Block** - Step with the right foot to the left to assume the closed leg/feet stance. Some people try to stay low in this stance - don't bother. There is no requirement that you bend your knees for balance nor anything else here. Just stand up with the knees relatively straight. Put the left hand over the right shoulder and beside the right ear. Reach forward and down with the right arm. Block downward with the left arm and then make an inside block with the right arm. Reverse the blocking by putting the right arm over the left shoulder and bringing the elbows together. Now inside block with the left arm and down block with the right without moving the feet.

   This technique stumps more people. The basic idea is to trade hands. The hand blocking inside goes down and back up. The other hand goes up and then down. It's that simple. You aren't doing that much, so don't panic and complain that the techniques are impossible to keep straight.

   Another important point is that many people skip the folding action and simply flip their arms out really fast. Cutting techniques is, in my opinion, sloppy and wasteful. I have learned, over many years, to perform the folding action while still being able to perform the two cross blocks inside of one second. It's not hard to do once you understand the body dynamics.

The trick is bringing the elbows very close together - so close that they touch - and then explode them apart. People who do not ever learn to snap their folding actions explosively are forever trapped in a world where a block requires two beats to perform. Learn to snap folding actions and make your feet keep up with your hands once you learn to keep everything together.

4. **Repeat on the Other Side** - Turn 180° and step into a right leg back stance. Inside block, and then stand up and perform the cross blocks. Remember, the right arm is inside, down, inside, and the left arm is the opposite. It's so simple.

5. **Double Hand Block** - Look to the left 90° and step in that direction with the left foot so that it becomes the front foot in a new back stance. Double hand block with the left arm and the right arm supporting. Fold for a double hand block by putting the left fist in front of the right shoulder and the right fist touching the left elbow. Block as the foot settles in as the front foot of a left side back stance.

6. **Spear Hand** - Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. As you step, stab the right hand forward to the middle level with a four finger spear hand stab. The left hand should fold palm downward and finish so that the right elbow sits on the back of the left hand. The left arm and right arms should form a perfect rectangle between them.

7. **Spinning Bottom Fist Strike** - Without moving the left hand, rotate the right wrist and forearm counter-clockwise so that the right elbow sticks up in the air. Spin into this technique by pivoting on the right foot as you pull the left foot forward in a counter-clockwise direction. As you spin and come forward, your right hand will end up on the small of your back with the back of your hand touching. Continue the step with the left foot stepping forward into side facing horse riding stance. Look over your left shoulder. Bottom fist strike with the left hand to your own shoulder height. Pull the right hand from behind the small of your back and draw it. The drawing action is really just a token motion, since you can't get anything out of it except recovering control over your right hand.

8. **Stepping Punch** - Step forward into a new right front stance and punch middle level. Kiai on this technique.

9. **Stand Up** - Pivot on the right foot and spin counter-clockwise, pulling your left foot up to the right. Stand up into the closed feet stance with both feet firmly together. As you do this, place your fists on your waist with your elbows pointing straight out like chicken wings. Do this quietly without any tension.

10. **Stomping Elbow Block and Back Fist** - From this position, raise the right knee up to the chest, after the knee is up, pivot to the left on the left foot, and then stomp down into a horse riding stance that is side facing looking over your right shoulder. The knee raise is a snapping action. The motion should look as though the knee comes up quickly and then bounces off an invisible object back toward the floor in a knee lift for a front kick. But there is no kick - just the knee lift. As the foot lands, turn at the waist so that the elbow of the right arm sweeps, in position with the fist on the waist, across to the left until it is pointing at the left 30 degree angle. Immediately bring the fist up and arc it over vertically for a

snapping back fist strike. The fist should take an angular trajectory - not travel straight up and then down. Rather, it travels up at a 70 degree angle, and then back down along that same angle. Snap it back to the waist.

Step forward with the left foot using the same stomping action. The stomping step will not work properly unless you understand that it is an underhanded arc, not an overhand arc. You must turn the hips into the direction you will travel before you lift the foot and knee very far, otherwise, you will end up raising the knee and then wildly swinging it about trying to take the step. Turn the hips, raise the knee, lower the knee as you complete the pivot, and repeat the mirror image of the elbow block and the back fist strike.

Step forward a third time the same way and repeat.

11. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - After returning the last back fist to the waist, reach under the left arm with your open right hand. The left hand should reach across with a fist until the elbows meet. Block in a round, sweeping motion with a vertical sword hand, slowly decelerating the technique and adding tension as you go.

    You should exhale slowly during this technique, but no one should be able to hear you. Don't hiss and wheeze as you exhale and block slowly. Just because you are tense doesn't mean you should be making a lot of noise when you breathe. Ideally, you want your breathing to be invisible and inaudible to everyone around you.

12. **Stepping Punch** - As soon as the vertical sword hand block reaches the end of its path, step forward and punch with the left fist in a front stance to the middle level.

13. **Pull and Punch** - This next step is a little tricky. Remember it has two parts and you'll perform it more easily. The first part is that you step with the right foot up to the left, and then you step out with the right foot until you are in a horse riding stance. You have not moved your hands yet. This is the first part of the step.

    The second part consists of you pulling the left foot to the right, pivoting on the right, and then turning 180° to face the rear. Continue stepping with the left foot to the left until you are in a new horse riding stance. Draw the left arm strongly while you punch over the left shoulder with the right fist. The fist is vertical for the punch.

    Perform this same technique to the right. Shift both feet to the right six inches by lifting the right foot and pushing off with the left. The left foot will drag the floor until the right is planted. Try to make the way that you perform this technique subtle. Don't lift the right foot far, and the whole shift is only a few inches.

Draw the right arm strongly while you punch over the right shoulder with the left fist in a vertical position. Do not look over the shoulders. Look straight ahead. Kiai on the second motion.

14. **Finish** - Stand back up into the natural position by recovering the right leg back up into the stance.

Heian Sandan



Heian Yondan

Heian 4 is usually the first kata that offers long-term challenges to the karate student. The problems for Karate players first encountering this kata seem to focus around the side snap kicks, making the kata flow, and constructing the awkward and unflattering back stances. Because of Heian Yondan's fluid mechanics, awkward and plodding performance which was easily hidden in the blocky movements of Heian Sandan is exposed in this kata as techniques that need improvement.

The kata utilizes more kicking with back fists thrown simultaneously, more reinforced

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Heian Yondan

blocking using both hands, and large use of the elbows and knees, but unfamiliar techniques are not more difficult, they are simply unfamiliar and performed to a different sort of rhythm. Practice will bring these techniques under control just as it has for all of the techniques the student has had to master up to this point.

The most difficult movements are generally considered by novices and many older students to be the back stance and the side snap kick. These challenging techniques require flexible hips and ankles. Strong knees are also helpful. Being 8 years old is also helpful. These techniques were not structured so that anyone could learn and perform them. Most adult novices find these techniques to be impossible to ever perform to the level demonstrated in books and videos.

The back stance and the side snap kick present a particular challenge to people with inflexible knees and ankles. While these techniques tend to attract quite a lot of instructive time in order to overcome this difficulty, I recommend that instructors teach these techniques with a goal of finding the student's limits in mind.

Contrary to the quaint platitudes offered by most karate texts, human beings do have limits, and straining those limits is both dangerous and unproductive. When the student has progressed as far as he can, the instructor must acknowledge the effort and allow the student to stop focusing on improving techniques that Father Time and genetics have placed out of the student's reach. Prioritization is a more useful skill to pass to students than is simply repeating the absolutism of, "You can do anything."

Thus, I recommend that at first the coach push the student to find what they are truly capable of, but at some point recognize that spending an unbalanced amount of time on these two techniques will not yield a return on investment in the future that will justify having done this. Give the techniques time, and then work with what you have.

The back stances of Heian Yondan were probably originally cat-leg stances (also called “cat stance” or “cat-foot stance”). Shito-Ryu still performs the kata using those stances. Also, the last two techniques used to be performed at angles, first to the left and then to the right.

That stands in contrast to the fact that a back stance is usually instigated by stepping backward from a standing position, and one usually stands up from it by stepping forward with the rear foot. So, the finishing movements of both Heian Godan and Heian Yondan are illogical when compared to the utility of these stances.

Today, instructor level Karate experts make subtle adjustments to the performance line of Heian Yondan in order to force it back to the same starting and ending point. Since the kata's last technique is not very adjustable, the rest of Heian Yondan must be rigged to return the kata solidly to the starting point, especially with today's competitions demanding that the starting and ending point be identical in Shotokan competitions. I like to widen the angle of the wedge block back stances so that they are shallower. That is a subtle change that makes it easier to return to the starting point.

However, I also believe that having to return exactly to the starting point of a kata is a silly exercise in perfectionism for perfectionism’s sake. While kata can be engineered to do this by the people who promote sport Karate, I do not see it as a valuable skill. It improves neither the appearance nor the function of practice or the resulting learning from the kata.

Heian Yondan

Heian Yondan introduces several technical patterns which appear over and over again in Shotokan kata. For example, the two side kicks with the thrusting back fist strikes will be repeated in Sochin and the two Kanku kata. The front kick followed by the vertical back fist strike is also another technique that will be demanded of the student later in their training.

Among the Heian kata, Heian Yondan is another that is unpopular among people who are not specialists in kata. Although exciting to learn as a new kata at first, Heian Yondan demands techniques from the human body that some people are simply not capable of performing, and this tends to make it popular only among kata specialists.

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Begin the kata with your hands relaxed at your sides in fists. Your feet should be about as far apart as your hips are wide.

2. **Two Handed Block** - Step out with the left foot into a back stance. Do not move the torso to the left. Instead, just lower the torso straight down as you bend the knees and move the left foot out into position. Bring both open hands by the right waist in no particular position, and then slowly bring them up and around strongly. Add tension and decelerate the action as you progress. The left arm performs a high level inside block with the back of the open hand. The right arm performs an upper level rising block, but the forearm and open fingers should point in the direction of the left foot.

   The fingertips of the right hand should point at the height of the left wrist. The forearms should be about 8 inches apart so that your face will fit between them. The wrists of both arms must be perfectly straight. The left elbow is at a perfect 90° angle as is the left shoulder. The right shoulder should be at 45°, and the right elbow should be at 100 degrees.

   When finished, this technique forms a nice rectangle between the arms.

3. **Two Handed Block** - Pull the hands down from their upward position to one beside the left waist. Leave the hands open in the sword hand shape palms down. Pivot on the heels to the right, looking 180° in the other direction, and repeat the decelerating, tensed blocking action to the right.

   It is not necessary to shift backward and slide a little when doing this. Some people do that, but technically, the kata is done with a step out and then an in-place pivot – not sliding backward.

4. **Lower X-Block** - Turn to the left 90° and step in that direction with the left foot. The left leg now becomes the front leg in a front stance. From their upraised position, cross the wrists of the right and left arms, and then x-block downward powerfully from that position.

5. **Double Hand Block** - Step forward with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot in a new back stance. Double hand block with the right arm and the left

arm supporting. Fold for a double hand block by putting the right fist in front of the left shoulder and the left fist touching the right elbow. Block as the foot settles in as the front foot of a right side back stance.

6. **Side Snap Kicks** - From the double hand block position you are in now, pull the left leg up to the right knee. The left knee should point outward in the direction that you are going to kick. The left hand should be at the right waist in the cup and saucer position. Side snap kick to the left as you throw a left side back fist strike. Unlike the first back fist strike, don't snap this time. Rather, left the back fist out after you strike. Snap the kick back immediately, though, and step down into a front stance that has no width - the heel s are in line. Drive the right elbow into the left palm, which is now being pulled back from the back fist strike. The fist of the elbow-strike hand can be palm down or palm inward.

   Typically in Shotokan kata, when you throw a single side snap kick, the back fist is snapped. When you throw two side snap kicks followed by elbow strikes, the back fist is left hanging extended after the strike.

   Be careful not to bend at the waist when you throw the side snap kicks. Your shin, shoulder, hip, and knee should all form a straight line from target to chin upon the maximum extension of the kick. Most people bend forward at the waist and turn their chest in the direction of the kick – which is less than ideal form for a side kick or a front kick.

   From this position, pull the left foot about halfway toward the right, and then raise the right foot to the left knee, turn the head to the other direction, and throw the mirror image of these techniques.

7. **Sword Hand Block and Strike** - Look over the left shoulder. Pivot on both heels to the left 90° so that your left foot becomes the front foot in a left sided front stance that is very wide and shallow. As you perform this pivot, move the left open hand down as if to block to the lower level with a sword hand block, and place the open right hand up in the air with the elbow at a 90° angle as if about to perform an outside block. Continue shifting the weight and turn the hips to the reverse half facing posture. The shoulders should finish facing 45° to the left. The right arm should strike in a round trajectory to the neck level with the palm flat and facing upward. The left hand should be in an open palm block to the upper level. The right elbow should be bent at about 10 degrees, and the right hand should be parallel to the floor.

   Some people strike with the right hand moving in a forward motion toward the target rather than a rounded motion. In fact, this seems to be becoming more and more popular. The strike should be performed with a round trajectory.

8. **Front Snap Kick and Back fist Strike** - Front snap kick by stepping forward with the right foot to kick. As you step down, bring the left hand out in front of you with the open palm facing down at stomach level. The right fist should be somewhat behind the head, and right elbow should point from between the eyes. Pull the elbow down strongly as you lunge forward and plant the right foot,

finishing by pulling the left foot forward into a crossed feet stance. This looks like a vertical back fist strike. Kiai on the strike.

When you consider that historically the side snap kick is a fairly recent invention, the kata starts to make a little more sense. If the side snap kicks were front kicks, then you would have three even techniques. The first two techniques as front kicks followed by the brutal elbow smashes. Following that would be a front snap kick with a more complicated vertical back fist and vertical elbow strike downward. Thinking about how one technique may explain another is a great way to come up with some fantastic applications for the kata techniques.

9. **Wedge Block** - From your current position, pivot counter-clockwise to the left on your right foot. As you pivot, extend the left foot outward to the 225 degree right flank from the kiai point. The left foot becomes the front foot in a new back stance. As you step outward, cross both hands at the wrists quickly with the palm sides of the fists facing inward. Burst them apart and then slowly wedge block with increasing tension and deceleration.

10. **Front Snap Kick** - Step forward with the right foot and front snap kick to the middle level. Leave the arms in the wedge position.

11. **Double Punch** - Punch with the right and then the left. The right punch has no chambering action, just punch directly from the wedge block posture you are in. The first punch snaps fast and the second punch thrusts strong.

12. **Wedge Block** - Move the right foot back in and then extend it out to the 90° angle to the right into a new back stance. Repeat the wedge block above.

13. **Front Snap Kick** - Step forward with the left foot and front snap kick to the middle level. Leave the arms in the wedge position.

14. **Double Punch** - Punch with the left and then the right. The left punch has no chambering action, just punch directly from the wedge block posture you are in. The first punch snaps fast and the second punch thrusts strong.

15. **Double Hand Blocks** - Shift the left foot to the left 45° so that it becomes the front foot in a new back stance. Double hand block with the left arm and the right arm supporting. Fold for a double hand block by putting the left fist in front of the right shoulder and the right fist touching the left elbow. Block as the foot settles in as the front foot of a right side back stance.

    Step forward and double hand block again.

    Step forward and block one more time for a total of three.

16. **Hair Grab** - Bend the front knee and straighten the back knee so that your stance goes from a back stance to a front stance. Don't shift the left foot outward to the left. Shoot both hands up quickly so that the two open hands stab up to ear level as if on the sides of someone's head.

17. **Knee Strike** - Bring the right knee up as if for a front snap kick, but don't snap kick. Instead, execute a thrust with the knee upwards and hold that position for a brief instant. Pull both hands downward in fists from their extended positions with the elbows straight. Place the fists to either side of the shin. The arms should be on a 45° angle downward when the action is complete. Kiai on this technique.

18. **Sword Hand Block** - Pivot to the rear 180° on the left foot in a counter-clockwise direction. Step down with the right foot into a new back stance so that it becomes the rear foot. Sword hand block to the middle level with the left hand.

19. **Sword Hand Block** - Step forward and sword hand block with the right hand.

20. **Finish** - Step the right foot back to the natural position to finish.

Heian Yondan



Heian Godan

This kata continues with Heian Yondan's survey of reinforced, double armed blocking and countering. Heian Godan, however, lacks the side snap kicking that is so challenging in Heian Yondan. Instead, there is a jumping maneuver that is fairly difficult to pull off if you are an older novice to karate. Heian Godan's jump is not the last seen in the kata, however. It is only the first time that the student of karate has been required to jump off of the floor in a kata. Kata such as Enpi, Kanku-Sho, Unsu, and Meikyo require jumps

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Heian Godan

that may reach high in the air, so the questionable skill of jumping is very important for those who aspire to be kata specialists. Be sure to read about the meaning of jumping in Schmeisser's Rules.

The mysterious techniques at the end of the kata, called the swastika postures, are generally interpreted as strikes followed by throws. Although each instructor will certainly interpret them according to his preference. Throwing techniques throughout Shotokan Karate kata are apparently encrypted into the structure of the kata. Why they are not more apparent is unclear. The last two techniques in Heian Godan, apparently

meaningless to the untrained observer, are samples of this coding of throws and locks into the kata.

The Heian kata are required by literally all Shotokan Karate organizations at the rate of one per kyu rank beginning at the eighth kyu. Generally, Heian kata are taught at a rate of one per every three months. Many students are exposed to the kata long before they ever learn them formally; meaning formal instruction is usually aided by the 3 month delay between the learning of each of the Heian kata. By the time a student is first being shown Heian Godan on a formal basis, it is likely that they have already been doing the kata out of curiosity. This makes the instructor's job much easier at this point, and might explain why many instructors say that they feel that they are teaching Heian Shodan and Heian Nidan continuously to their clubs, but they never seem to be teaching the other three Heian kata.

The Heian kata are required kata for competition in most organizations, especially in the style tournaments. The Heian kata are randomly chosen for elimination rounds in which two karate experts simultaneously perform the same kata side by side. The winner is chosen, and the loser is eliminated. Tekki Shodan is also used as a first round elimination kata.

Aged and physically weak individuals generally attempt to hide their poor jump underneath a tremendous kiai during the jumping action. Mastering the jump in Heian Godan is only the beginning for a future kata champion, however. Some of the kata separate the men from the boys through these difficult techniques, but most of the jumping is believed to be a relatively recent development. Most of these techniques are thought to originate from simple stepping actions.

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Begin the kata with your hands relaxed at your sides in fists. Your feet should be about as far apart as your hips are wide.

2. **Inside Block** - Step out with the left foot into a back stance. Do not move the torso to the left. Instead, just lower the torso straight down as you bend the knees and move the left foot out into position. Fold for a left inside block as you step out, and then focus the block in time with the foot stepping down.

3. **Reverse Punch** - Stay in the back stance, and punch across your body to the left. This is a very difficult technique. It requires that you rotate the hips, but the problem is that almost nobody can rotate their hips in a back stance without moving the rear knee. Since you are forbidden to move the rear knee, you have to twist at the waist. It's your only choice, and it can be difficult. Try your best to twist in the direction you need to in order to punch with a straight arm.

4. **Hook Punch** - Look to the right. Step slowly with the right foot up to the left. As you pull the right foot up, pivot the feet to face to the right 90° angle (the front of the room). Hook punch with the left fist. The punch should be slow and tense.

Add tension and decelerate as you punch. The forearm of the punch should be angled slightly downward. The feet should come together in the closed feet stance. The knees should be relatively straight, not bent visibly.

5. **Repeat** - Perform this same sequence to the mirror side. Step out with the right foot into a back stance, punch with the left hand, and then step up slowly while hook punching with the right arm. The only difference: Look forward instead of to the left while hook punching.

6. **Double Hand Block** - Step forward with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot in a new back stance. Double hand block with the right arm and the left arm supporting. Fold for a double hand block by putting the right fist in front of the left shoulder and the left fist touching the right elbow. Block as the foot settles in as the front foot of a right side back stance.

7. **Lower X-Block** - Step forward into a front stance with the left foot. The left leg now becomes the front leg in a front stance. From the right shoulder upraised position, cross the wrists of the right and left arms, and then x-block downward powerfully from that position while rotating the shoulders to front.

8. **Upper Level X-Block** - Open the hands and stab upward without uncrossing the wrists. When you finish, your elbows should be at 90° angles and the center of the X should be above your forehead.

9. **Pressing Side Block** - Without changing the stance or the posture, stand in place and move the hands to the right side of the torso below the shoulder. To do this, unhook your hands during the motion so that they are no longer pressed together by the back of the hands. Press the palm heels together, and as you lower the hands to your right, your hands will spin. Finally, the right hand fingertips will point forward, and the left hand fingertips will point to the right.

10. **Straight Punch** - Punch with the left fist from the pressing side block posture. Some people begin the next step before they execute this punch.

11. **Stepping Punch** - Step forward and punch middle level in a front stance. Kiai on this technique.

    The timing of the entire kata up to this point is 1--2-----3--1--2-----3--4--5-6789.

12. **Big Stomp and Down Block** - Turn 180°, pivot to the left on your left foot, and then raise your right knee into the air. You should be facing squarely to the left when your knee is up in your chest like this. Leave your left arm where it was in physical space, not in relation to your body. When you pivot, move into it and collapse your shoulder inward. Reach over your left shoulder with your right fist and prepare a down block. All of the above happens simultaneously.

    Now continue pivoting to your left and lower your foot strongly into the floor, stomping as you assume a horse riding stance facing to the left. During the entire

turn, keep your eyes to the front. Sharply down block to your side, keeping all of these movements synchronized.

13. **Back Hand Block** -Turn your head sharply to the left 180°, then fold your arms so that your right arm and fist are reaching over your left arm and open hand. Fold before the block quickly and strongly. Quickly at first, then very slowly move your open hand, formed like a sword hand with the fingers straight, palm side following. Some people prefer to face the palm downward at first and then turn the wrist only at the last portion of the movement for drama. Either way is OK.

14. **Crescent Moon Kick** - Once you have reached the pinnacle of this motion, turn to your left and crescent kick into the palm of your hand with the sole of your right foot. Do not move the left arm while you do this - keep it in position relative to the room, not the body. Your left shoulder will close inward as you perform the kick and turn the body forward. Leave the right hand at the right hip. Keep it in position relative to the body. As you connect with the palm of your hand during the kick, you will continue turning and step down into another horse riding stance facing the opposite way from the last one.

15. **Elbow Strike** - As your foot makes contact with the floor, simultaneously strike the palm of your left hand with your right elbow. Turn your right fist so that your palm faced inward or downward - it doesn't matter, your elbow doesn't change. Your left arm, as you were stepping through, eventually started to bend at the elbow to facilitate this move. Your arms should describe a perfect rectangle in front of your chest.

16. **Double Hand Block** - Look right 90°. From this position, move the left foot up to and behind the right so that you assume the crossed feet stance. Now Double hand block to your right with the right arm. The left arm is supporting.

17. **Uppercut** - Look 180° to the left. Immediately step out about 1 foot with the left foot so that you assume an L stance with the left foot as the front foot. Punch upward with the entire double hand block mechanism.

18. **Jump and Lower X-Block** - Bend the knees slightly. Move the hands lower as you pivot to face the left 90° angle. Leap off of the left foot and lift the right foot behind it. Tuck the feet and legs up against the body tightly. Pull both arms back in drawn positions. As you land, step down into the crossed leg stance with the right foot in front and the left behind. X-block to the lower level. Try to keep your back erect without bending over.

19. **Double Hand Block** - Step forward into a new front stance with the hips to the side. Fold for a double hand block by putting the right fist in front of the left shoulder and the left fist touching the right elbow. Block as the foot settles in as the front foot of a right side front stance. There is no width to this stance - the heel should be in line with each other.

20. **Swastika Blocks** - Look over the left shoulder to the 180° angle. Shift the weight to the left leg so that it becomes the front leg in a new front stance. Straighten the back leg. At the same time, swing the right hand around and down

in a lower level sword hand strike from the outside inward. The left hand should be open as well with the palm facing inward. Execute a passing block with the left hand and finish beside the right side of the neck.

Shift the weight to the rear by straightening the front leg and bending the rear so that the stance moves from a front stance to a back stance without moving the feet. Upper level inside block to the rear with the right hand. Down block to the front with the left hand. The inside block fist should pass over the head as it travels to its finishing position.

Pull the left foot to the right and stand up with the knees relatively straight. Pivot on the heels so that you face the opposite side. As you do this, use moderate speed and relaxed motion to trade the arms. The right arm should go to the down block position and the left arm should go to the upper level inside block to rear position

Step forward into an in-line front stance and strike with the open hands as before. Shift the weight back to a back stance and perform the swastika blocks again.

21. **Finish** - Lift and withdraw the right foot back to the left to stand in the natural position.

Heian Godan



Tekki

The Tekki kata are three unusual kata in the Shotokan system. Originally Tekki were referred to as the **Naihanchi**. Naihanchi can be written in many ways including one way that means "in the middle of the battlefield." Naihanchi were given the new name of Tekki by Funakoshi to replace the Okinawan name. Other styles still practice these kata under the name Naihanchi. Unlike many of Funakoshi's other attempts at renaming kata, this new name took hold and became commonly used.

内歩進　内畔戦

Naihanshin　　Naihanchi

The new name, Tekki, is composed of two kanji characters. The first character is Tetsu, and it means "iron" or "steel." The second character is Ki, and it means "ride on a horse", "equestrian", or "knight." Iron Knight, Steel Knight, Steel Horse Riding are all valid interpretations.

The Okinawan name is written in Nagamine's "Essence of Okinawan Karate-do" using a kanji for **han** that I cannot locate even when I search Chinese dictionaries. Kanazawa writes the name in three ways. The two ways above, and with katakana which are used to write foreign words.

The two words above both begin with "nai." Nai means "inside" or "inner." The hanchi part is different between the two. The one on the left is "walk + progress." The one on the right is more complicated. The middle kanji means the land that is between two rice paddies. The last means battle or war. A battle on a narrow walkway of dirt between rice paddies? I am tempted to conclude that all ways of writing this word are being reverse engineered by these authors and that no one really knows how to write it - not even the Okinawans.

Equestrian Karate
The fact that the horse riding stance is used throughout these kata may lead one to believe that the kata is symbolic of fighting techniques that would be used by a horseman in combat. Are the techniques supposed to be used from the back of a horse?

The Tekki were considered very important by Funakoshi. In many of his texts, he refers to years of training in the Naihanchi kata. Since there is so much emphasis on stepping sideways, the knees are thought to be strengthened through practice of the Tekki kata. Also, the sideways movement of the legs has been found to be quite beneficial to people with knee problems. Therapists are frequently recommending side to side knee training exercises to people with bad knees. Also, the horse riding stance itself is very beneficial



"Tekki." Tetsu = Iron, and "ki" = knight.

for strong knee development. Perhaps Funakoshi's love of the kata paid him some benefits.

The Source
The Tekki kata are thought to be much older than the Heian kata. There are three Tekki, and number two and number three (Nidan and Sandan) are thought by some to have been created by the inventive Itosu Yasutsune. The first Tekki kata is often credited to Matsumura Sokon of Tomari City, Okinawa. However, no one can really be sure, since no real records exist to confirm or deny this story.

Runts of the Litter
The Tekki kata are a little repetitive and contain some unusual hand techniques. Although when asked most karate experts will agree that practice of the Tekki is very important, in reality few Karate experts ever train the Tekki kata with any diligence at all.

The Tekki are seen as runts in the kata litter in today's karate, and they merit little more than token practice among many.

Applications Gold Mines
Do not skip over the Tekki as though they are unimportant. I cannot fault anyone for having such feelings about Tekki, since none of the keepers of Funakoshi's legacy have passed down any reasonable Tekki applications to their students. The Tekki kata contain training in many techniques and combat sequences which are quite effective and necessary for a thorough understanding of hand techniques. Finding these techniques is quite a feat, because the side to side stepping usually manages to disguise what is really going on.

Schmeisser's Rules for reverse engineering kata applications indicate that anytime your feet cross, you are actually supposed to be pivoting in place. The corners have been removed from the Tekki, and the kata's actual directions unfolded into a giant straight line. Once folded back into a box shape, the Tekki are a fascinating study of shifting, turning, and brutally crushing techniques which allow the enemy no quarter.

The Tekki are hair pulling, knee stomping, genitalia squashing, throat crushing action from start to finish. In fact, the finish can be interpreted more deeply than simply two punches to the side. Instead, you can grab your opponent's head, pull it to your hip to smash his nose, then reverse your grip and throw his head away. This could potentially crack someone's neck because their head will twist violently against their neck. Note: do not actually do that to someone that you do not wish to see buried in a graveyard.

Tekki are more than a simple exercise in brutal combat. They also offer several keys to understanding basic techniques. The return wave kick which appears in Tekki Shodan is very educational for foot sweeping and throwing leg movements. Any good foot sweep has three components: the angle of attack, the sideward sweeping action, and the lifting component. The return wave kick has all three of these component, though that isn't how I would use it in combat!

Heian or Tekki
Traditionally, Shotokan Karate students are presented with the Heian kata 1-5 one at a time, one kata per rank. Then, after reaching the 3rd kyu, Tekki Shodan is suddenly required for student. The next two Tekki kata are not required of anyone until the examinations for nidan (2nd Dan) and sandan (3rd Dan) under rules.

Rather than merely serving as additional basic kata in addition to the Heian, the Tekki serve as an alternate path to the more difficult kata. One could follow the Heian 12345, or one could begin with the Tekki 123 and move from there. This fits nicely with the third potential known path of Gojuryu - Tensho and Sanchin. There are other kata that have been used as pathways through which novices can learn the basics needed for more challenging kata, but they have fallen flat internationally and are not usually recognized as real works of art.

The Gekisai and the Taikyoku are two other groups of basic kata. The Taikyoku are thought to be a Funakoshi creation for the purpose of teaching elementary students.

Most Shotokan style clubs do not do these kata any longer, although some groups still enjoy them. The Gekisai are reminiscent of the Heian/Pinan kata.

Gekisai are practiced in Goju-Ryu, and the first of them, Gekisai Dai Ichi has been picked up by Shorin-Ryu schools under the name Fukyugata Ni. Shito-Ryu schools practice a kata that Mabuni Kenwa created for his students which is a combination of the two Gekisai kata called Chi No Kata or Shinsei. Shotokan is almost alone amongst Japanese systems of Karate not practicing these kata in one form or another.

Because the Best Karate series presents the Heian first and then the Tekki, most instructors of style Shotokan present these kata to their students as secondary to the Heian and less than the other kata. Most students learn Tekki Shodan, but few ever go on to learn the other two kata. Most training is only cursory in the Tekki, and this is a shame.

Tekki



Tekki Shodan

Tekki Shodan, unlike Tekki Nidan and Tekki Sandan, begins with the open hands pointing fingers down toward the floor, rather than from a natural stance with the hands resting at the sides. This motion is commonly made at the beginning of many kata in the Shito Ryu, and may be indicative of the opening movement for many Shuri City kata.

鉄騎初段

Tekki Shodan

Directions

1. **Begin** - Stand in the closed feet stance with the left open hand over the right in front of the thighs. The palms should be turned in, and the fingertips should point straight down. The fingernails of the left and right hands should overlap.

2. **Step Across** - Look to the right. Step the left foot over the right, but not too far in front of it. As you perform this kata, you will cross your feet at the ankles many times. If you put the crossing over foot too far in front of the support foot each time, eventually you will work your way forward by about 3 feet. Step so that the

outside edge of the left foot is touching the outside edge of the right foot. Bend the knees as you take this step.

3. **Back Hand Block** - Raise the knee of the right foot up into the chest keeping the foot close to the body and step out into a horse riding stance. The step should describe the top half of a circle with the foot. From the hands' current position, block outward with the back of the open right hand to the middle level. The left hand should draw back against the waist.

4. **Elbow Strike** - Still looking right, strike with the left elbow horizontally to the right. Pull the right hand palm inward to meet the elbow. The forearms should be parallel to the right side, not at an angle. The difficult part about this technique: Do not move your knees, even if you cannot turn your hips. You'll have to twist at the waist.

5. **Cup and Saucer** - Look to the left. Bring both fists down to the waist, strongly drawing the right hand back and putting the left fist vertically on top of the right fist.

6. **Down Block** - Continue looking to the left. Block to the left side with a left down block from the current positioning without any chambering action.

7. **Hook Punch** - Draw the left arm back strongly and hook punch with the right fist across the front of the chest. The forearm should be angled downward slightly. The arm and the chest should form a rectangle when viewed from above. The elbow finishes bent at 90°.

8. **Inside Block** - Step with the right foot over the left with the feet very close together. Step very quickly, but then pause slightly at the part where the foot touches the floor, and then continue with the movement. Step up with the left foot in an arcing stomping step as in the second movement of this kata. As you do this, reach with the right hand over the left drawn fist to chamber for an inside block. As the foot lands, block with the right hand inside outward.

   Some people, who have reverse engineered the applications for these techniques, recommend that you not throw a choked inside block without its folding component like this. In order for this to work as an arm bar, it requires the execution of a full inside block. So, an alternative way of performing this technique is to reach forward with the left fist, and to reach underneath the left arm with the right to fold for the block, then inside block strongly as the foot stomps. This is probably a more useful technique in the end, but most style kata competitors prefer to perform their techniques with shortcuts that will make them snappy.

9. **Sweeping Blocks** - Down block with the right arm. The left arm should sweep up and outward with the fist pointing at a spot just about the left ear. The palm should be down and in. Be careful not to reach with the right shoulder or turn the torso when you perform this technique. The shoulders stay in place.

10. **Close Punch** - Bring the right arm up so it is in a hook punch position. Bring the left arm down and flip the wrist so that your fist is pointing upward in an uppercut position with the elbow resting on the back of the right wrist.

11. **Return Wave Kicks** - Look to the left and lift the left foot up without changing the position of the hips or the right knee. Lift the foot so that the sole is upwards and in front of the groin. Snap this technique, obviously, and as you set it down, swing both arms to the left, turning the left wrist over so that the left fist is now overhand. The left elbow should still be on the wrist of the right forearm.

12. **Another Return Wave Kick** - Look to the right. Perform the mirror image of what you just did above. Wave kick and then continue using the arms in their previous position, and swing them around to the right as if outside blocking with the left arm. Flip the wrist over so that the palm turns upward again. The elbow never leaves the right wrist.

13. **Cup and Saucer** - Look to the left as you bring both fists to the right waist in a cup and saucer position.

14. **Two Punches** - Punch to the left with the left fist from the cup and saucer position. Hook punch with the right. Unlike Kanku-Sho and other kata with two punches, these punches are not both straight. The right arm should finish at a 90° angle and pointing slightly downward. The left should punch straight out. The fist of the right arm will never pass the edge of the body. Kiai on this technique.

15. **Back Hand Block** - Fold the left hand under the right and slowly block with the back of the left hand. Decelerate and add tension as you progress.

16. **Elbow strike** - As before, elbow strike into your left palm. You are going to do the rest of the kata as the exact mirror image of the first half from this point forward.

17. **Cup and Saucer** - Look right. Cup and saucer to the left waist.

18. **Down Block** - Down block to the right side.

19. **Hook Punch** - Hook punch with the left arm.

20. **Inside Block** - Step across with the left foot, step in an arc with the right, stomp as you land and inside block.

21. **Sweeping Blocks** - Down block with the left arm. High sweeping block with the right as before but on the other side.

22. **Close Punch** - Pull in the left arm to the hook punch posture. Set the elbow of the right arm on the back of the left wrist as you close punch to the chin level.

23. **Return Wave Kick** - Look right. Return wave kick with the right leg. Block outward and overhanded with the right arm without changing the structure of the two arms.

24. **Another Return Wave Kick** - Look left. Return wave kick with the left leg. Block underhanded to the left side.

25. **Cup and Saucer** - Pull both fists to the left waist.

26. **Two Punches** - Punch with the right arm to the right side. Hook punch with the left. Kiai.

27. **Finish** - Return to the opening posture by pulling the right foot back to the left into a closed feet stance,. Place the left hand over the right as before.

Tekki Shodan



Tekki Nidan

The second and third Tekki kata are generally considered to be Free Kata rather than Required Kata for examination purposes. Rarely do karateka learn the second and third Tekki kata early in their training. The first Tekki kata is required not only for most 3rd kyu examinations, but also for elimination kata competition in most Shotokan tournaments.

The second Tekki Kata is very rhythmical compared to the other two Tekki. Properly performed, this simple kata can be very interesting and dynamic to an observer.

Another technical difference between Tekki Sandan and Tekki Shodan and Nidan is the way in which the blocking and covering action is performed (the most distinctive



Tekki Nidan

technique in Tekki). The elbows are drawn together rather than the forearms.

Directions

1. **Natural Stance** - Unlike the first Tekki with it's interesting opening posture, this kata begins in the natural stance. Start with the feet hips width apart

pointing outward just a little. Relax the arms at the sides. Hold the fists lightly - don't squeeze them. You should be relaxed.

2. **Double Elbow Raise** - Step across with the left foot over the right. As you do this, pull both fists upward so that they are facing palm down. Increase tension and decelerate as you move. Finish the technique with the elbows pointing outward to the sides and the fists in front of the breasts.

3. **Double Arm Block** - Step upward so that the foot and knee arc upward and across finishing as the right leg in a horse riding stance. As the knee comes up, put the fists together over forehead height, and put the elbows together as well. As the leg comes down, burst this posture apart and block outward in a sort of convoluted wedge block. The right arm should block inside outward to the right with the right fist overhand. The left arm should finish in a hook punch position, even though you did not throw a hook punch.

4. **Supported Lower Level Block - Inside** - Step across with the left foot again. As you step across, pull the right fist back and across the front of the lower body in a sweeping outside inward block to the lower level. The left hand should be placed on the right elbow with the thumb wrapped underneath the right arm. Bring the right fist all the way to the left knee.

5. **Supported Lower Level Block - Outside** - Step out with the right foot into a horse riding stance by keeping the foot very close to the floor. As you step out, block outward to the right with the right arm. Continue to keep the fist palm away from the body. The result should be a lower level inside block. The left arm remains on the right elbow to support the block.

6. **Double Eblow Raise** - Look left and pull the left foot to the right so that you stand up into the closed feet stance. Straighten the knees so that they do not bend visibly. As you stand up, pull the fists up to the breasts as before, and point the elbows outward. Decelerate and add tension as you do this.

7. **Double Arm Block** - Step upward with the left foot so that the foot and knee arc upward and across finishing as the left leg in a horse riding stance. As the knee comes up, put the fists together over forehead height, and put the elbows together as well. As the leg comes down, burst this posture apart and block outward in a sort of convoluted wedge block. The left arm should block inside outward to the left with the left fist overhand. The right arm should finish in a hook punch position, even though you did not throw a hook punch.

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9. **Supported Lower Level Block - Outside** - Step out with the left foot into a horse riding stance by keeping the foot very close to the floor. As you step out, block outward to the left with the left arm. Continue to keep the fist palm away

from the body. The result should be a lower level inside block. The right arm remains on the left elbow to support the block.

10. **Fist in Hand** - Look to the right. Draw the left arm strongly back into a vertical open hand with the palm toward the body. As you pull the hand in, place the right fist into the palm of the hand. The technique finishes much like the opening sequence of Enpi.

11. **Supported Inside Block** - Inside block directly from the previous posture to the right 45° angle. You can throw the block a little further to the right, if you prefer. The palm of the left hand slides around the fist until it the open left hand is firmly pressed against the outside of the right wrist as if to support.

12. **Hand Over Fist** - Look straight ahead. Draw the right hand back strongly in a fist. Slide the left open hand over the fist so that you end up in a position where it is as if you are punching into your left palm and both hands are at your left waist. At the same time you are pulling back, raise the right knee strongly to the front as if to front snap kick, but do not kick - just raise the knee. Keep the foot close to the body. The knee raise should peak as the drawing of the right hand finishes. As you set the right foot back down where it came from in a horse riding stance, strike horizontally with the right elbow to chest height. Your fist should still be in your left hand. Your hands should be in front of the middle of your chest on this technique. Your right shoulder reaches forward.

13. **Grasping Block** - Look right. From its current position, reach up with the right open hand with the thumb out and arc it over until it is fully extended to the right side at shoulder height. This action happens almost entirely at the elbow. There is a small shoulder motion, but for the most part, the elbow does the work. This is not a vertical sword hand strike. Begin the motion quickly, then decelerate and add tension as it progresses. Draw the left arm back slowly.

14. **Hook Punch** - Draw the right arm back as you hook punch with the left. The forearm should angle slightly downward. The left fist should not extend beyond the edge of the right side of the torso. From above, the hook punch should be seen to describe a nice rectangle in front of the body.

15. **Inside Block** - Step across with the left foot. Pause slightly as the left foot touches the floor. Turn to look straight ahead. Lift the right knee and perform the arcing knee-lift stomping step so that when you finish, you are in a horse riding stance again. After the foot begins its descent, reach across the body with the left arm to fold for an inside block. Nakayama recommended that you do not move the right arm out to participate in the folding action. Some people are reverse engineering this action back into the kata. Inside block strongly with the left arm as you finish the stomp.

16. **Sweeping Blocks** - Downward block with the left arm. The right arm should come up beside the head so that the right fist is pointing palm down at the top of the head.

17. **Close Punch** - Bring the left arm up so that it is back in the hook punch position, but you do not hook punch. Strike forward and down with the right arm so that the elbow rests on the back of the left wrist. The right fist should be palm upward and at your own throat height. Kiai on this technique.

18. **Fist in Hand** - Look to the left. Draw the right arm strongly back into a vertical open hand with the palm toward the body. As you pull the hand in, place the left fist into the palm of the hand. The technique finishes much like the opening sequence of Enpi.

19. **Supported Inside Block** - Inside block directly from the previous posture to the left 45° angle. You can throw the block a little further to the left, if you prefer. The palm of the right hand slides around the fist until it the open right hand is firmly pressed against the outside of the left wrist as if to support.

20. **Hand Over Fist** - Look straight ahead. Draw the left hand back strongly in a fist. Slide the right open hand over the fist so that you end up in a position where it is as if you are punching into your right palm and both hands are at your left waist. At the same time you are pulling back, raise the left knee strongly to the front as if to front snap kick, but do not kick - just raise the knee. Keep the foot close to the body. The knee raise should peak as the drawing of the left hand finishes. As you set the left foot back down where it came from in a horse riding stance, strike horizontally with the left elbow to chest height. Your fist should still be in your right hand. Your hands should be in front of the middle of your chest on this technique. Your left shoulder reaches forward.

21. **Grasping Block** - Look left. From its current position, reach up with the left open hand with the thumb out and arc it over until it is fully extended to the left side at shoulder height. This action happens almost entirely at the elbow. There is a small shoulder motion, but for the most part, the elbow does the work. This is not a vertical sword hand strike. Begin the motion quickly, then decelerate and add tension as it progresses. Draw the right arm back slowly.

22. **Hook Punch** - Draw the left arm back as you hook punch with the right. The forearm should angle slightly downward. The left fist should not extend beyond the edge of the left side of the torso. From above, the hook punch should be seen to describe a nice rectangle in front of the body.

23. **Inside Block** - Step across with the right foot. Pause slightly as the right foot touches the floor. Turn to look straight ahead. Lift the right knee and perform the arcing knee-lift stomping step so that when you finish, you are in a horse riding stance again. After the foot begins its descent, reach across the body with the right arm to fold for an inside block. Nakayama recommended that you do not move the left arm out to participate in the folding action. Some people are reverse engineering this action back into the kata. Inside block strongly with the right arm as you finish the stomp.

24. **Sweeping Blocks** - Downward block with the right arm. The left arm should come up beside the head so that the left fist is pointing palm down at the top of the head.

25. **Close Punch** - Bring the right arm up so that it is back in the hook punch position, but you do not hook punch. Strike forward and down with the left arm so that the elbow rests on the back of the right wrist. The left fist should be palm upward and at your own throat height. Kiai on this technique.

26. **Finish** - Finish by standing up drawing the right foot back into the natural stance.

Tekki Nidan



Tekki Sandan

The neat thing about the Tekki kata is that while they are all very similar, they are also very different from each other. Tekki Sandan contains techniques from the first two, but it also contains some interesting revisions of how to perform those techniques.

The second and the third Tekki kata are thought to be the creation of Itosu, while the first was the creation of his instructor, Matsumura Sokon. Nobody knows the truth. We can only imagine.

鉄騎参段

Tekki Sandan

Tekki Sandan contains a different way of performing the sweeping blocks and close punches of the first two Tekki. It also contains, and perhaps explains, techniques from Jion, Jiin, and Heian Sandan. Kata may serve as repositories of information about other kata, so Tekki Sandan may be a clear fit.

Are these all of the Tekki kata? Were there other Naihanchi kata that were not brought into Shotokan? Were there going to be as many of these as there were Heian? Do they correlate to the Heian in any fashion? Could there be more of these kata that we have not

found? What was the real purpose in creating kata that used this form of stepping and stance? While we are able to reverse engineer the kata, the original intent is lost for all time.

Why is Tekki 3 considered to be an advanced kata on par with Sochin, when it is no more difficult than the first Tekki kata? Is it just a way of organizing these kata? Why Tekki 1 is favored so much over the second two? Because it is more punch and kick than the second and third kata?

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Begin Tekki Sandan by standing in the natural position. Start with the feet hips width apart pointing outward just a little. Relax the arms at the sides. Hold the fists lightly - don't squeeze them. You should be relaxed.

2. **Inside Block** - Step out with the right foot into a horse riding stance. Glide the foot close to the floor. Fold the arms for a left side inside block as you step. Focus the block as your foot stops moving. Lower your body by bending your knees as you step out.

3. **Cross Block** - Put the left hand over the right shoulder and beside the right ear. Reach forward and down with the right arm. Block downward with the left arm and then make an inside block with the right arm.

4. **Sweeping Block** - Raise the left arm from the down block position up to a position as if it had just completed a hook punch. However, don't throw a punching action - just raise the arm up. Also, the forearm should not be tilted downward as it is in a hook punch. Move the right arm over at the same time so that the elbow of the right arm touches the forearm of the left arm only 2 inches down from the elbow. This movement brings your shoulders inward toward each other and collapses your chest.

   Leave the left arm where it is for the rest of this technique, despite the temptation to move it. Now move the right arm up and out so that the elbow points outward from the shoulder at shoulder height and the fist points at the top of the head with the palm side toward the shoulder.

   Now throw the close punch by making a motion as if performing an outside block with the right arm so that the right elbow rests on the back of the left wrist when you are finished.

5. **Pull Back** - Draw the right elbow back strongly until the right fist rests at the right waist. Move the left arm closer to the body and open the left hand so that it is flat and facing palm down just over and in front of the right fist.

6. **Punch** - Punch with the right hand strongly somewhat more in front of the right shoulder than on the centerline of the body. The palm of the left hand rests on the right elbow.

7. **Twist** - Without snapping the punch, immediately twist the right fist over clockwise. The right elbow should bend slightly as you do this, but no more than 5 or 10 degrees. Look to the right sharply as you twist the fist.

8. **Step Across** - Unlike Tekki 2, there is no sweeping of the arm back to the left as you step across the right foot with the left foot. Just leave the arm where it is and step across with your left foot to the right. Step out to the right with the right foot into a horse riding stance. As you do this, block with your right arm with the elbow straight to the lower level with the inside of the wrist. Keep the left hand on the right elbow.

   You began this supporting hand position with all five fingers across the right elbow. However, at some point, usually when you perform the block to the right, the right thumb moves underneath the arm.

9. **Overhand Down Block** - This is a strange one. From the down block position, keeping your elbow straight for the most part, bring the right fist to the left and around and over your head in a huge circle. Keep the left hand on the right elbow the whole time. Bring the right fist back down to the lower level on the right side with the palm side down.

10. **Draw the Hand** - Draw the right elbow back strongly until the right fist rests at the right waist. Move the left arm closer to the body and open the left hand so that it is flat and facing palm down just over and in front of the right fist.

11. **Punch** - Punch with the right hand strongly somewhat more in front of the right shoulder than on the centerline of the body. The palm of the left hand rests on the right elbow.

12. **Two Cross Blocks** - Put the left hand over the right shoulder and beside the right ear. Reach forward and down with the right arm. Block downward with the left arm and then make an inside block with the right arm. Perform the same action again on the opposite side so that your left arm is in the inside block position and the right arm is in a downward block position.

13. **Sweeping Block** -Move the left arm up and out so that the elbow points outward from the shoulder at shoulder height and the fist points at the top of the head with the palm side toward the shoulder. Leave the right arm in the downward block position.

14. **Close Punch** - Now throw the close punch by making a motion as if performing an outside block with the left arm. Raise the right arm up into a hook punch posture so that the left elbow rests on the back of the right wrist when you are finished. Kiai on this technique.

15. **Arcing Stomp** - Leave the arms in position and step with the right foot over the left, pause briefly as the ankles cross, and then step out to the left with the left foot into a new horse riding stance. However, to step, you will raise your left knee upward into your chest and over to the left in a large semi-circle. Bring the leg back down to the floor strongly.

16. **Sweep and Close Punch** - Move the left arm over at the same time so that the elbow of the left arm touches the forearm of the right arm only 2 inches down from the elbow. This movement brings your shoulders inward toward each other and collapses your chest. Leave the right arm where it is for the rest of this technique, despite the temptation to move it. Now move the left arm up and out so that the elbow points outward from the shoulder at shoulder height and the fist points at the top of the head with the palm side toward the shoulder. Now throw the close punch by making a motion as if performing an outside block with the left arm so that the left elbow rests on the back of the right wrist when you are finished.

17. **Pull Back** - Draw the left elbow back strongly until the left fist rests at the left waist. Move the right arm closer to the body and open the right hand so that it is flat and facing palm down just over and in front of the left fist.

18. **Punch** - Punch with the left hand strongly somewhat more in front of the left shoulder than on the centerline of the body. The palm of the right hand rests on the left elbow.

19. **Twist** - Without snapping the punch, immediately twist the left fist over clockwise. The left elbow should bend slightly as you do this, but no more than 5 or 10 degrees. Look to the left sharply as you twist the fist.

20. **Step Across** - Unlike Tekki 2, there is no sweeping of the arm back to the right as you step across the left foot with the right foot. Just leave the arm where it is and step across with your right foot to the left. Step out to the left with the left foot into a horse riding stance. As you do this, block with your left arm with the elbow straight to the lower level with the inside of the wrist. Keep the right hand on the left elbow.

    You began this supporting hand position with all five fingers across the left elbow. However, at some point, usually when you perform the block to the left, the left thumb moves underneath the arm.

21. **Overhand Down Block** - This is a strange one. From the down block position, keeping your elbow straight for the most part, bring the left fist to the right and around and over your head in a huge circle. Keep the right hand on the left elbow the whole time. Bring the left fist back down to the lower level on the left side with the palm side down.

22. **Draw the Hand** - Draw the left elbow back strongly until the left fist rests at the left waist. Move the right arm closer to the body and open the right hand so that it is flat and facing palm down just over and in front of the left fist.

23. **Punch** - Punch with the left hand strongly somewhat more in front of the left shoulder than on the centerline of the body. The palm of the right hand rests on the left elbow.

24. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Look to the right, and sweep the right vertical sword hand from it's position on the left arm across to the right side. Decelerate and add tension as you perform this technique.

25. **Hook Punch** - Draw the right arm back as you hook punch with the left. The forearm should angle slightly downward. The left fist should not extend beyond the edge of the right side of the torso. From above, the hook punch should be seen to describe a nice rectangle in front of the body.

26. **Step Across** - Step the left foot over the right to the right, and pause briefly as the ankles come close together.

27. **Inside Block** - Step to the right with the right foot into a new horse riding stance. Raise the right foot up and over with the right knee in the chest in a snapping action forming a large semi-circular arc as you stomp with the right foot. Inside block with the left arm by move it directly from its hook punch position.

28. **Cross Block** - Put the left hand over the right shoulder and beside the right ear. Reach forward and down with the right arm. Block downward with the left arm and then make an inside block with the right arm.

29. **Sweeping Block** -Move the right arm up and out so that the elbow points outward from the shoulder at shoulder height and the fist points at the top of the head with the palm side toward the shoulder. Leave the left arm in the downward block position.

30. **Close Punch** - Now throw the close punch by making a motion as if performing an outside block with the right arm. Raise the left arm up into a hook punch posture so that the right elbow rests on the back of the left wrist when you are finished. Kiai on this technique.

31. **Finish** - Stand back up, drawing the right foot back in to the natural position.

Tekki Sandan



Bassai-Dai

Bassai probably means something like "Extract from a Fortress." In short, "Rescue." The first character can be read as nuki or batsu, depending on the combination and the natural way of using them already intuited by native speakers. It means "to extract" or "to draw out." The second character can be read fusagu or sai which means "close, shut, obstruct, or get in the way of." There are many meanings that could possibly be drawn from this character combination.

The name "Bassai" can be written with six different characters, and no Japanese Karate

抜塞大

Bassai-Dai

instructor is really sure which of the kanji are the originals. The ones I picked above seem to be repeated in Funakoshi's Ryukyu Karate Kenpo (1922). One such reading gives the meaning of "extract from a fortress." Another means "remove an obstruction." The common English translation is "To Penetrate a Fortress," however, there does not seem to be a kanji for penetrate among the many that are used in the name of this kata. What caused so many publishers of karate books to put the name "To Penetrate a Fortress" for a translation of this word out there is a mystery, because I don't see how that translation is possible.

Best Karate Volume 6 by Nakayama Masatoshi (English edition) and **Karate-Do Kyohan** by Funakoshi/Ohshima (English edition) both present the "Penetrate a Fortress" translation of Bassai. Japanese editions of the books use the characters that I used above. Another famous book about kata says that the meaning of Bassai is "To Thrust Asunder."

I do not believe such translations of these characters are possible, and I have looked everywhere, including through Chinese and Korean interpretations of the characters. No “penetrate” is anywhere that I can find it. Perhaps I am missing something? But it has been over a decade since I discovered this, and I haven’t seen any evidence to the contrary in that time.

Dai and Sho Kata
The last character, Dai, means "large." The three "Dai" kata in Shotokan are Kanku-Dai, Gojushiho Dai, and Bassai-Dai, and each is apparently given that name to distinguish it from a different version of the same kata that has been brought into the Shotokan system. The Dai kata are the "large" kata, hence the character for "big" being tagged onto the name. The other kata in these pairs are the "Sho" kata or the "small" kata.

From Tomari or China?
Bassai-Dai is a very old kata, and there are many different versions of it. While some credit its creation to Matsumura Sokon, in reality no one knows for sure if the kata was created by him or not. We don't really know where all of these Bassai kata came from, nor do we know who created the first one. We don't know how old the kata is, nor do we know if it was born in China or in Okinawa.

Bassai-Dai is thought to come from Tomari, however, this is based upon tertiary evidence and is probably not possible to prove today. There are other versions of the kata which have names which refer to the city of Tomari such as Oyadomari Bassai, which means "Bassai Parented in Tomari." Some claim that this name refers to a man named Oyadomari. There is also a Tomari Bassai. Both Tomari Bassai and Oyadomari Bassai look very similar to each other. I do not believe it matters where these kata come from. It is more important who they come from. But in this case, even that is unknown.

Like the other Shotokan kata thought to have been parented in Tomari, such as Jutte, Jion, Jiin and Empi, Bassai begins with the right fist covered by the left hand. This movement is apparently peculiar to some of the kata in Shotokan which seem to come from Tomari City. This gesture may come from China as a sign of respect, or it could simply be a way of performing kata that the person who gathered these particular kata together enjoyed. Maybe an Okinawan karate expert always started his kata in this position, and we retain the movement today. We really cannot be sure about the history here.

Version, Version, What's the Version?
There are many different versions of Bassai-Dai such as Matsumura Bassai, Tomari Bassai, Oyadomari Bassai, and Ishimine Bassai. All of these different versions are similar in their basic shape, but none of them are identical to each other. The common theme between these different versions of Bassai seems to be the large number of blocking motions at the beginning of the kata, followed by several sword hand blocks and a low

level side thrust kick. The differences lie in the kinds of blocks and the body motions made during the blocking maneuvers. One version has the sword hand blocks executed to the lower level. Many of the versions prefer the cat leg stance over the back stance, but this is not surprising considering that the back stance seems to have been brought into Shotokan in the 1930's.

Applying Bassai-Dai

Bassai-Dai, more than any other kata, leads one to think about alternative applications for the techniques beyond those given in most karate books. The techniques simply make no sense at all given the Shotokan combat style based on aggressive attacking punches, kicks, and foot sweeps. Block, block, block, and block some more. Why would anyone do that? The answer, of course, is that no one would do that; Therefore that is not what is being done. There must be more to this kata than simple blocks. Once you have reached that conclusion, you begin traveling down the road of finding advanced applications in all of the kata.

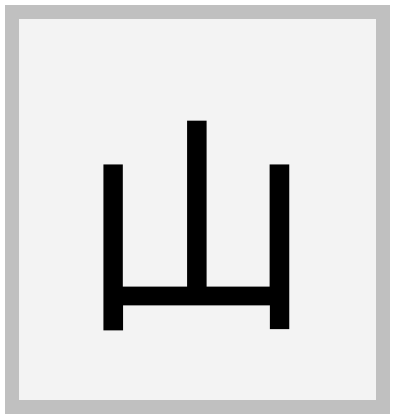
There are many interesting applications of the kata Bassai-Dai. Of course, the most obvious applications involve blocking and countering a large number of kicks and punches from opponents surrounding the performer. Actually, the kata contains even more interesting applications among the group of blocks that have no counter attacks built into them. The blocks can be interpreted as a series of throws and sweeps combined with wrist locks and arm bars to form a deadly array of techniques thrown against much fewer attacks and attackers than the simplistic interpretation would allow. Reverse engineering of kata like Bassai-Dai requires great knowledge of karate techniques, and it also requires a rather extensive knowledge of Jujutsu techniques so that the throws, locks, and other un-Shotokan-like techniques will become apparent through careful analysis.

Go Tell it on the Mountain

The three Yamazuki near the end of the kata shape the upper body like the kanji character for "mountain" in Japanese. Thus, the punches are named "mountain punches." This is a repeating theme in Shotokan kata. Hangetsu and Jutte also contain postures named after Yama that resemble this kanji. Postures that are designed to show various kanji are not uncommon among the kata. Some kata draw a kanji on the floor if you follow the foot patterns.

Bassai-Dai is considered a representative kata of the Shotokan style because of the usage of large scale techniques which have wide motions, like the Yamazuki. The kata is very similar to the other most common kata performed in Shotokan: Kanku-Dai. Movements 9-14 especially resemble Bassai-Dai. Whether one kata steals this motion from another is unknown.

Bassai-Dai



Yama

Bassai-Dai is generally considered to be an intermediate kata. Many brown belted students are exposed to it and required to perform it for examinations for the 2nd or 1st kyu rank.

Probably the hardest part of performing Bassai-Dai is the hip motions. The hip is frequently put into the reverse front facing posture in this kata. That is not a posture that many karate enthusiasts are suited to making. Fast, strong, and snappy hip rotation are needed to really pull t off a good Bassai-Dai in a competition. Because this is considered a required kata for competition, you will not see it performed as someone's specialty kata in the final stages of any tournament.

Directions

1. **Yoi and Begin** - Different people begin this kata differently. Depending upon your instructor and your reasons for doing this kata, you will perform different actions following the bow. This wasn't very important when you were doing the Heian kata, but beginning with Tekki 1 and Bassai-Dai, the opening posture of the kata is no longer the same old natural, relaxed posture.

   If you are performing in a tournament, the typical order to follow is (1) Stand at attention, (2) bow, (3) assume natural stance and announce the kata, and (4) assume the introductory posture for the kata commonly known as yoi.

   If you are performing this kata by yourself, and if you are not practicing for a tournament, you can skip all of the bowing and introductory nonsense and simply assume yoi (4) above and get to work.

   When performing the kata in front of others, but not using a tournament format, generally you (1) assume attention, (2) bow, and (3) assume the yoi posture of the kata.

To take the yoi posture of this kata, move your left foot in to your right foot so that both feet touch from ball of foot to heel. This is called Heisoku Dachi, the closed feet/close leg stance. Place your right fist inside your left open palm with your right wrist bent somewhat. The reason you bend the wrist is that you try to make the knuckles of both hands line up, and you should also try to straighten both elbows. Your wrist bending is not important, so don't worry about it. Stand in that position and look straight ahead.

2. **Falling Tree** - The next technique is called a vertical back fist strike with a reinforcing left palm placed on the right wrist. Before you move, though, you begin leaning forward slowly. Count to yourself, 1..2..3.. then stop leaning forward and lunge forward with the right foot. When it lands, pull the left foot up right behind it and assume the crossing stance (kosadachi). The left foot should be very close against the right foot. Do not cross your legs at the knees or shins - cross them at the ankles. This is very difficult to learn.

   The hands should travel a striking trajectory, not a circular swooping one. As you lean forward, do not move the hands. As soon as you begin to lunge forward, raise both hands in the same posture into your chest as you turn it half facing. Then fire the fist forward sliding the left hand around the fist until it is positioned on the right wrist. Keep your fingers straight on your left hand. The left middle finger fingernail should be directly next to the very base of the palm.

   Does the left hand actually reinforce anything? More than likely - no. In fact, in all of the places in all of the Shotokan Kata where a technique is called "reinforced" - usually this is the appearance alone. Try to think of other meanings for such movements.

3. **Two Inside Blocks to Rear** - Turn your head 180° to the rear, and fold your arms right over left in preparation for the inside block to follow. It is important that you stretch your arms as far into this folded position as you can. The right hand should be pointed in the direction you are turning. Don't wrap the right arm around the body.

   Unfold the arms into a block strongly as you step so that the focus of the block and the step itself are synchronized. You should be in a half facing posture - hanmi. Now prepare for the next block by folding the arms again. When you fold the arms, be sure that you do not turn the hips yet. Most people ruin this technique by turning their hips with the folding action. Don't move the hips until you block. Now throw the block and turn the hips sharply to the reverse half-facing position. No, there is really no such thing as this position - mostly you just assume the front facing position and then twist your spine a little and strain to do a reverse half-facing posture.

4. **Outside then Inside Block** - Another 180° turn to the rear, so that you are facing the front again. Turn the head first. As you look over your right side, you should move your right leg over to the right so that it can become the front leg in a right side front stance. Raise the right fist so that it points directly to the rear with the elbow straight. Raise the left arm up so that the elbow is at 90°, ready to

do an outside block. Strongly assume the stance by shifting your weight as you rotate your hips into another reverse half-facing posture.

Time the block so that it focuses as you complete the weight shift and the hip rotation. Your shoulders should be at 45° from the front, even though no one's hips could ever do that in a front stance - make it look like you can.

Fold the arms for an inside block. Again, be careful not to turn the hips until you are blocked from the folded position. Don't turn your hips when you fold your hands. The hips should snap nicely around as you block.

Also of importance is that you never move your head during these hip rotation movements. Point the nose directly ahead, and never allow your head to move from that spot, no matter what your shoulders are doing. You'll have to carefully time turning your head so that you don't end up cutting your eyes left and right. The hip turns are much more dramatic when the head does not move.

5. **The Scoop** - This technique requires a little finesse. Most people bludgeon their way through this one. From the right side inside block, pull the right foot back to the left and pivot on both heels to the right 90°. Stay low as you pivot, but do not bend forward. As you come to fully face to your right and complete the scoop, straighten the knees gently. Finish this movement by smoothly continuing straight into the folded posture for a right side outside block. Raise the right hand up, putting the shoulder and the elbow both at 90° angles.

6. **Outside Block** - Step forward strongly with the right foot and outside block strongly with the right side so that you finish in a half-facing posture.

7. **Inside Block** - Fold the arms without turning the hips, and then turn the hips strongly in the reverse half-facing posture. Inside block strongly. Some people, on this particular technique, pull the front foot back about 6 inches. You are not supposed to do that on any of the previous reverse side blocks. However, I think because Osaka Yoshiharu, of Best Karate fame, did this particular block that way on a video tape repeatedly, everyone has started copying his little foot tugging action. The feet should not move.

8. **Stand and Deliver** - Pulling the left foot back parallel with the right, take a natural standing posture with your legs while you put both fists on your right waistline. The right fist is in a typical draw hand posture. The left fist sits on top of it in a vertical posture. Keep the shoulders square to the front, but do try to pull both fists back directly to your side at the same time.

9. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Now slowly extend the left hand outward in a circular blocking action. At first move the hand quite rapidly, but then use increasing slowness and tension. Some people like to flare their hand by beginning the movement with the palm up so that they can turn their hand around at the very end. This is for show only, and it really doesn't matter which way you do it.

10. **Punch and Block** - After you feel that the extended vertical sword hand has enjoyed enough hang time to produce drama, quickly punch with the right hand without turning your hips or your shoulders. Immediately fold your arms for a right side inside block, but do not turn your hips. Step to the side with the left foot strongly assuming a moderate-depth front stance. Some people turn their front foot to the side, others try to keep both feet to the front. I recommend turning to the side. The stance you assume should be in-line, don't try to give it width by stepping back.

    As the foot lands, violently turn the hips and shoulders in synch with your block. It is extremely important that the hips turn with the block as you step. Do not fold the arms as you step, or you will lose the hip rotation from your blocking action. Keep your nose facing forward at all times. Turn your head to the right strongly to prevent cutting your eyes.

11. **Punch and Block** - Stand up quickly and mirror the action you just performed above exactly.

12. **Four Sword Hands** - Keeping the head pointing forward as you change directions, pivot on your left foot and pull the right foot in next to it as you fold your arms for a right sword hand block. Step forward smoothly and block sharply. After the block, pause for a moment. Then step foward and block again. Pause for a moment. Now step forward and block again. Without pausing, step backward and perform another block. The entire sequence should count as 1...2...3.4. The small pauses you insert after blocks one and two will ensure the dynamics of blocks three and four showing nicely.

13. **Wanna Wrastle?** - Shift the front foot to the left by about 12 inches and assume a left front stance. Move the hips into the reverse half-facing posture you tried to make earlier. Leave the left and right arms where they are. The right arm should be resting on the middle of the torso. The left arm should be moved so that it stays in the same place relative to the rest of the room - not your body. Let your left shoulder move as you turn to the front and then the left with your shoulders.

    Raise the right hand, palm up and open, underneath the left arm. As it passes the left hand, extend the left thumb and have the left hand follow the right. Do not allow the left hand to touch the right, but keep them close together, with the left middle finger pointed at the right wrist, and the left thumb pointed at the center of your right forearm.

    Turn the right wrist at the top of the motion, and begin to slowly bring both arms down by bringing your elbows closer to your sides. Both hands should be open with thumbs extended. Some people try to curve their right hand as if they are grabbing a small tree - that's unnecessary and ugly. Your shoulders are now 45° to the left.

14. **Low Side Thrust Kick** - Raise the right knee up into the space in between your elbows. Don't move your arms as you raide the leg. As you kick strongly down at a 45° angle, pivot on the rear foot and turn your hips to the left side so that you

are fully side facing. To do otherwise is to invite injury with repetitive action. Pull both arms up simultaneously so that they are in fists and you appear as though you are trying to pull on an enormous boot over your right foot with both hands. The thumb sides of your hands should be close together. Kiai on this technique.

15. **Two Sword Hands** - Raise the knee out of the kick and continue turning until you are facing the rear. Execute a left sword hand block as you step down into a back stance with the leg you just kicked with. Pause a moment. Step forward and perform another sword hand block in a back stance.

16. **Upper blocks** - Pull the right foot back to the left gently. When you do this, it is important that you do not put weight on the right foot first and then push off. Lift the foot and pull it back. Pull both arms in front of your abdomen as you pull in with your fists palm up knuckles down. Stand upright with your knees straight. Raise both arms upward slowly into upper level rising blocks. Keep the base knuckles of your index and middle fingers close together as you do this with both hands.

17. **Tear a Sheet of Paper** - Now pull the hands away from each other about six inches each and stop strongly as if you are tearing a sheet of paper in half over your head.

18. **Around and in** - Raise the right knee moderately high and then lunge forward into a front stance. As you move into the stance, bring both fists from their upraised posture around and down in a circular fashion until finally both are striking inward with the palm sides up. Focus the action when the fists are even with the sides of the body.

19. **Lunge Punch** - Lift the front foot slightly and push off with the rear foot so that you advance about one foot. Middle level punch. The timing for the techniques from the upper blocks should be ....1..2.3..4.

20. **Two Handed Grab** - Look to the rear. Move the left foot just enough that it becomes in-line with the front foot. Open both hands and your arms so that your left hand is over your left knee in a lower level sword hand block position. Your right hand should be a sword hand as well, and it is raised up as if you are about to perform an outside block. Now quickly bring the left hand up so that it stops over the right shoulder with the palm facing inward to the neck. Be careful not to wrap the hand around the neck - keep the fingers straight.

    Bring the right hand around and down so that it stops as if an inside moving lower level sword hand strike. Keep the elbows of both arms very close together. Your shoulders should be pulled inward toward each other. The hips should attempt to turn forward, however, in an in-line stance which will probably not be possible. Just do your best to turn forward without falling down.

21. **Swastika** - Slowly pull your front foot back to your rear foot so that both feet are facing to your right. Keep your head pointed forward as you come up into a full standing position with the knees straight. The left arm is moved down into a downward block synchronized with the right arm being moved into an upper

level inside block to the rear. There is a trick to doing this movement properly.

Make sure that the right arm, while moving upward, takes a curved trajectory. Do not pull it away from your left side in a straight line. Instead, make the right fist travel in a diagonal arc away from your face so that your fist goes over your head and is never close to your head horizontally or vertically. Most people bend their right elbow too much and pull the fist under their chins.

22. **Big Stomp and Down Block** - Still looking to your left, pivot to the left on your left foot, and then raise your right knee into the air. You should be facing squarely to the left when your knee is up in your chest like this. Leave your left arm where it was in physical space, not in relation to your body. When you pivot, move into it and collapse your shoulder inward. Reach over your left shoulder with your right fist and prepare a down block. All of the above happens simultaneously.

    Now continue pivoting to your left and lower your foot strongly into the floor, stomping as you assume a horse riding stance facing to the left. During the entire turn, keep your eyes to the front. Sharply downblock to your side, keeping all of these movements synchronized.

23. **Back Hand Block** - Turn your head sharply to the left 180°, then fold your arms so that your right arm and fist are reaching over your left arm and open hand. Fold before the block quickly and strongly. Quickly at first, then very slowly move your open hand, formed like a sword hand with the fingers straight, palm side following. Some people prefer to face the palm downward at first and then turn the wrist only at the last portion of the movement for drama. Either way is OK.

24. **Crescent Moon Kick** - Once you have reached the pinnacle of this motion, turn to your left and crescent kick into the palm of your hand with the sole of your right foot. Do not move the left arm while you do this - keep it in position relative to the room, not the body. Your left shoulder will close inward as you perform the kick and turn the body forward. Leave the right hand at the right hip. Keep it in position relative to the body. As you connect with the palm of your hand during the kick, you will continue turning and step down into another horse riding stance facing the opposite way from the last one.

25. **Elbows** - As your foot makes contact with the floor, simultaneously strike the palm of your left hand with your right elbow. Turn your right fist so that your palm faced inward or downward - it doesn't matter, your elbow doesn't change. Your left arm, as you were stepping through, eventually started to bend at the elbow to facilitate this move. Now in place, without moving the feet, down block from that position with the right hand. Leave the left fist touching the inside of the right elbow, and make that hand into a fist as well. Then, sharply reverse the position without any folding or preparing. Just flip the arms. Flip them again so you are back where you were. This should be performed with a count of kick.elbow..downblock..downblock.downblock.

26. **Yama Means Mountain** - Move both hands sharply to your left waist in the cup and saucer position, turn your head to the right, do not widen stance but shift into a front stance facing what was your right side. The stance should have no width to it at all. As you shift into this front stance, punch strongly with both hands. The right hand should punch as an undercut or close punch. The palm is up at the finish point, and the elbow is touching the side of your body. The Left hand punches over your head, palm down. Try to keep your fists perfectly vertical to each other when viewed from all angles.

    Your body should be side facing, not front. If you turn your body front facing for this technique, as is probably the original way to do it, then you cannot punch and make the mountain shape properly because your shoulders will be at the wrong angle.

27. **More Mountains** - Pull the right foot back to the left so that the feet touch from front to back. The knees should be straight. The fists come back to the right side of the body in a cup and saucer shape. After a lengthy pause here (about a second), raise the left knee sharply and stomp down while throwing another mountain punch, this time with the left side forward. Pull back and repeat again on the right side. There are a total of three mountain punches.

    Some people do some very ugly and unnecessary things during these three techniques. (1) Some people bend their knees in the heisoku dachi posture. Don't lock them, but don't bend them visibly either. There's no reason to bend them. (2) Most people have an ugly mountain punch. The reason for that is pretty simple: It's a difficult technique to shape properly, and in order to focus it, you must truly understand synchronous contraction. (3) Many people try to throw a little kick into the knee lifts - don't. That is historically closer to the Okinawan way of doing this, I think, but not in Shotokan.

28. **Super Scooper** - Look to the rear over your left leg. Raise your right hand up in the air in a fist straight up. Move your left hand to your waist in the drawn position. Pivot and pull the feet together, then shift the left foot out to the left side into an in-line front stance. As you step out, perform a scooping block by lowering your right arm down to point at the floor, then sweeping it across so that the inside of the forearm acts as the blocking surface. Do this strongly and quickly. Increasing speed as you go, continue the motion so that you pivot on your right elbow, moving your forearm not like an inside block but in a circular fashion back around to shoulder height. Then continue the motion so that your fist drops straight down. Finish with the fist pointed downward at a 45° angle.

29. **Return of Super Scooper** - Raise the left arm straight up, shift your weight to the right, and then mirror image the previous technique without moving the feet except to pivot. There is still no width in the stance and no step.

30. **Two Knives and a Push** - Snap the head sharply to the 45° angle to the right. Move lively - you are nearing the end. Bring the left heel to the right and fold for a sword hand block. Step forward into a back stance and execute the sword hand block strongly and quickly. Look to the right flank at 90° and pull the right foot in toward the left, then extend it into a back stance pointed at the right flank.

Look to your left 90° so that you are looking 180° away from where your stance is pointed. Make this motion very slowly, increasing tension and slowness as the technique progresses.

The arms should stay in the sword hand block posture that they were in after the first block. Once you have paused for enough drama in this position, suddenly bring the right heel to the left, and execute a sword hand block directly ahead in the direction you are looking. Kiai on this technique.

31. **Finish** - After the kiai echo has faded, slowly draw the left foot back to the right, and assume the opening posture for the kata with the feet together and the fist in the left hand. Remember to lift the left foot to pull it back, do not push off with it.

Bassai-Dai



Bassai-Sho

The name for Bassai-Sho is the same as Bassai-Dai. The only difference the the suffix -Sho, which means small. Bassai the smaller, small Bassai - these are both fair translations of the word. The same issues with the Kanji for Bassai-Dai apply to Bassai-Sho.

The hyphen between the Bassai and the suffix, -Sho or -Dai, is optional. I prefer Bassai-Sho, but unfortunately I'm a little inconsistent with it. You can write it all of these ways: Bassaisho, Bassai-sho, Bassai-Sho, Bassai sho, or Bassai-Sho. It doesn't matter.

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Bassai-Sho

Child of Bassai-Dai or Sibling?
Bassai-Sho is built upon the same basic framework as its big brother Bassai-Dai. Itosu Yasutsune is thought to have created this kata sometime in the late 1800's, possibly not

from the original Bassai-Dai kata that we practice today but from another version of Bassai practiced in Shuri-Te (Shorin-Ryu). There are many, many versions of the Bassai kata, originally called Patsai or Passai on Okinawa. Oyadomari passai, Tomari Passai, Koryu Passai, Matsumura Passai, Passai Sho, and Passai Dai are all different versions of the kata concept known as Bassai. All of them run along the same sort of theme, but each is different from the others in fundamental ways. Is Bassai-Sho just one of these other Bassai kata imported into the Shotokan system and given the name Bassai-Sho? Or is it a creation of Itosu as legend says it is?

Bassai-Sho begins with a yoi position that looks something like that of Bassai-Dai. Itosu may have based Bassai-Sho (as we call it today) upon Bassai-Dai. Also, the first postures' similarity to each other is also indicative that by the beginning of the 20th Century, the posture in Bassai-Dai had already moved from the high position in front of the chest to the lower position in front of the hips. The posture in Bassai-Sho is performed with two open hands touching at the edges. This posture is unique among kata of Shotokan Karate and possibly all of the kata from Okinawa.

I doubt that Bassai-Sho was created from our Bassai-Dai. Rather, I have a feeling that it is yet another version of Bassai from Okinawa.

Chinese Origins?
These Bassai Kata may be descended from exercise routines in China known as Ba Ji Ch'uan. There are supposedly two forms: Ba Ji Xiao and Ba Ji Da. The Bassai kata were paired from ancient times in China? Or is this a pair of exercises so far removed from what we do today that merely the names are the same? Ba Ji Xiao is written exactly the same way as Bassai-Sho. If this pair of Chinese forms are the same kata, then perhaps the entire Dai-Sho naming scheme originates from China as well. If that is true, then it would invalidate the currently popular belief that the -Sho kata were mostly authored by Itosu Yasutsune.

It is unfortunate that better records were not kept of who was practicing what on Okinawa. All we have to go on today are comparisons of the ways that we all do the same kata differently and maps of who our teachers were. We have some stories about who studied with who, and we can pinpoint their social relationships to one another, but that's about it. The rest is all guesswork and reverse engineering. Believe whatever you like, but don't believe it strongly. It's undoubtedly wrong.

Beaten With The Ugly Stick
Bassai-Sho has a unique emphasis on stick defenses and counters. This emphasis upon reacting to attacks from a stick is supposedly typical of an Itosu created kata, since all of the kata that he heavily influenced contain stick countering techniques within them. Supposedly Itosu's father used to tie him to a stake and poke at him with a stick to teach him fighting spirit. According to the legend, Itosu was very interested in techniques that would allow him to take a stick away from his father and avenge himself. The legend would neatly explain a lot about the kata that are supposedly influenced by Itosu's heavy-handed staff-technique architecture. However, the whole legend is probably just a story with little basis in truth.

Matsumura Bassai?
Having recently learned Matsumura Bassai as retained by the folks who practice Shito-Ryu, I am convinced that Bassai-Sho is based on Matsumura's version of the kata. The double punches at horizontal level, the ridge hand striking with a kick – all of this is found in Matsumura Bassai, as is the opening technique.

Who did the borrowing and changing, I do not know. But I am pretty sure that Shotokan's Bassai-Sho is a derivative of Matsumura Bassai.

Technical Features
Bassai-Sho contains many techniques that are worth noting for those who like trivial facts about their kata. Interestingly, the last two sword hand blocks at the end of Bassai-Dai are apparently new creations. The ending of Bassai-Sho is the original ending for our Bassai-Dai kata. This is evidenced by the Shito-Ryu version of Bassai-Dai which still ends with the interesting hand motions which resemble vaguely the concluding techniques of Bassai-Sho. Apparently Bassai-Sho's ending used to be Bassai-Dai's as well. Perhaps Bassai-Dai is the victim of more revisions than Bassai-Sho.

Other changes to our kata involve the other sword hand blocks. These were originally lower level going in one direction and middle level going in another. The Shito-Ryu Bassai-Dai is still performed in this manner, and I believe their Bassai-Dai is closer to the original kata that Shotokan's Bassai-Dai sprang from based on viewing Shorin-Ryu versions of the kata Passai. It's obvious that Shotokan's version has been heavily toyed with. When watching the Shito-Ryu version of Bassai-Dai, the kata clearly begins scooping from the lower level upward. As it progresses techniques are executed to the middle and then upwards. At the end, the techniques are generally from the high level downward. I am not sure there is any significance to this, but it is interesting to note. I've been told before that the techniques in a kata working their way from low levels to high levels are trying to pass on a theme: kick your opponent in the shin, and then try to throw him.

The side thrust kick is present in Bassai-Sho, as in Bassai-Dai, but the hands take an inline position during the kick, rather than the pulling action that is made in Bassai-Dai. I have no idea why this is the case. Perhaps someone translated the original hand motion two different ways from a single source kata, or perhaps the difference is purely cosmetic and of recent origin.

Not Advanced, Just Different
Bassai-Sho enjoys a reputation as an advanced kata of greater difficulty than Bassai-Dai. However, the primary reason for this belief is its obvious lack of popularity among present day Shotokan enthusiasts. Since Bassai-Sho is so unpopular, only a few Karate players train long enough in their lives to ever reach a point where they might wish to learn it. This "popularity determining difficulty" happens quite a bit in Shotokan Karate kata. There are other kata which are no less or more difficult than Bassai-Dai or Bassai-Sho which are considered more difficult than others simply because not many people wish to learn them and knowledge of the kata tends to be in the hands of advanced students who are more likely to have explored the kata of the Shotokan Canon thoroughly enough to learn some of the more obscure ones.

The difficulty of a kata should be determined by the amount of acrobatics it contains. Bassai-Sho contains no movements that anyone could not learn as a first kata.

Directions
Although Bassai-Sho may not be a derivative of Bassai-Dai, because of standard Shotokan training methods, I am compelled to view it in those terms. In the directions that follow, I make frequent references to Bassai-Dai's directions. Though I recommend that we not view Bassai-Sho and other kata like it as more advanced, it is a fact of life that few instructors know this kata, and most people who learn it have been practicing Bassai-Dai for a very long time by the day they learn it. Therefore, most will view it through the lens of Bassai-Dai.

1. **Cross Your Hands** - This kata begins in the closed feet stance with both feet touching ball of foot to heel pointing straight ahead. If you skip any type of natural stance between the bow and this opening posture, you'll have to bring your feet together. The hands are positioned as sword hands crossed with fingers pointing to floor, left hand in front of right, the outside edge of left hand touching thumb side edge of your right hand. This is not a lower level X block. Move into this posture quietly and without any speed or tension. Remain relaxed.

2. **Lunging Pressing Blocks** - As in Bassai-Dai. Bassai-Sho begins when you lean forward gradually at in the initial posture for about two seconds before suddenly lunging forward. As you lean, however, do not remain still as in Bassai-Dai. Instead, turn the hips to the side and bring both hands around the left waist as you block with your right palm to the rear at belt level. At the same time that the block connects, you should be lunging forward with your right foot off of the ground.

   Lunge forward into a crossed feet stance as in Bassai-Dai, but don't keep the hips to the front as you do in the other kata. Instead, the hips remain half-front facing, and the right knee should be pointed off to the 45° angle to the left. As your right foot touches the floor, raise both hands up again, with the palm of the left hand still pressed against the back of the right hand, so that the right hand throws a back handed sword hand block, as in Kanku Dai, to the high level. The left hand remains pressed against the right, so really it is the back of the left hand that would be doing the blocking.

   This technique is especially difficult. To make it beautiful, carefully check the left arm. The upper arm, when viewed from the side, should be at exactly 45°. The forearm should be parallel to the floor. The left wrist should be perfectly straight. When viewing the left arm from the front, the elbow should be hidden behind the left hand. The right elbow and shoulder should both be at perfect 90° angles. When viewed from the front, the right wrist should be perfectly straight, and most difficult of all, the right elbow should be directly beneath the right hand, not off at an angle. Hitting this level of technique on a violent lunge is not easy and requires that you practice this technique into a mirror over and over again until you can do it with your eyes closed.

3. **Taking the Staff** - The double handed tiger mouth posture, as the Japanese call it, is performed in one of two ways. One is very pretty and totally impractical. The

other way is very practical but lacks something in the way of performance art. No matter which way you perform it, others will say, “That's not the way you do it,” so perform it according to your personal preference.

Practical: Turn 180° by pivoting on the right foot so that it becomes the rear leg in a back stance. Lower the left arm against the body so that the left forearm is touching the belt as you pivot. As the stance begins to take shape, bring the left forward and up from underneath so that it appears to scoop upward. Lift the right elbow up and over the head so that the right hand ends up in front of the forehead palm up. Both hands should be palm up and open, and the thumbs should be out.

Pretty: Turn 180° by pivoting on the right foot so that it becomes the rear leg in a back stance. Part both hands as you bring your hands in an arc over the head and down to the right as if the entire mechanism were moving downward and unfolding. Both hands should be palm up and open, and the thumbs should be out.

Obviously, the Kohko Uke, or Tiger Mouth Blocks, could be made to work using either method. The practical method is more commonly seen, but the kata itself is so uncommon that you could perform it either way and succeed. This technique should be performed with increasing slowness until the technique decelerates to zero with increasing tension. Do not make so much tension that your hands shake - this is supposed to be a graceful, fluid kata, not an exercise in quivering and straining.

4. **Wrench the Staff** - Lift the left hand smoothly and evenly with increasing tension. Lower the right hand as you rotate the wrist clockwise to make the hand face palm down. Stop moving once the left arm is straight out from the left shoulder and the shoulder joint is at a perfect 90° angle. The right shoulder should be at the same angle. Be careful that the right elbow doesn't wilt and droop down. You should be able to take a staff and run it through the path created by the palms. Be sure they line up as if they are holding an imaginary stick, but don't grip the fingers into fists. This technique is actually called Calm Water Staff Motion.

5. - Turn 270° clockwise using the right foot as a pivot. That's a little different for a Shotokan kata, isn't it? As you pivot, draw the left hand back to the waist and form the right hand into a ridge hand. Sweep across in front of the knees with the ridge hand as you pivot so that the block is complete when the turn is complete. Straighten the knees as you finish and raise the hand up, over the head, and bring it around into a downward block or bottom fist strike with the right side. The ridge hand should be a calm, relaxed technique, but the bottom fist strike should be relatively fast and sharp. Perform all of this as one motion without pausing.

6. **More Staff Techniques** - Step forward into a back stance with the left foot and perform the techniques I stepped you through above. Remember that when you step forward into a back stance, really only the foot moves forward. Your torso

should lower toward the floor as the right knee bends, not lean back or otherwise travel forward.

7. **Ridge Hand and Saucer** - Pivot on the right foot and pull the left foot back to the right as you pivot the entire torso counter clockwise so that it faces the left side in the opposite direction from where it was in the back stance. Keep your nose pointed in the direction it was in the above techniques so that you end up looking over your right shoulder. The right hand, now in a ridge hand again, should be pulled back over the left fist which is drawn back at the left waist. Do this quickly and quietly.

8. **Side Snap Kick** - Draw the right knee upward and point it out to the right at 90°, then fire off a side snap kick. At the same time that you side snap kick, ridge hand strike to the right with the palm upward. Don't snap the technique back immediately. Instead, leave the arm hanging or the short time that it is out there as a cover for the back of the knee.

9. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - As you pull the side snap kick back, fold the arms for a left vertical sword hand block to the 90° angle to the left. Turn the head sharply as you fold the right arm under the left with both hands open and both palms upward. Execute the sword hand block very quickly and sharply as you land in a horse riding stance.

10. **Double Punch** - In place, punch with the left arm and then the right. Do not turn the shoulders or the hips as you throw these punches, and make sure that the knees are pushed outward away from one another strongly enough that the legs do not move either. The first punch should snap, the second should thrust.

11. **Swastikas One Way and Then The Other** - In place, pivot on both heels to the left 90° and shift the torso back over the right foot so that you are in a back stance. Quickly throw the swastika block. Reverse positions almost immediately. The secret to performing these two techniques quickly and easily is to relax and not try to put a lot of tension into the finishing postures. Just relax and move smoothly and you will be surprised how quickly you are able to make each posture.

    It's funny to me that the Japanese idea for a swastika is the reverse of Hitler's notorious emblem, but most people are unaware of that. So, when people see the Japanese using a swastika, usually the Shinto usage of this symbol has to be explained to them. "The symbol is reversed - it's not the same thing." However, in this kata, you do the posture one way and then the other, so in one of those postures, I guess you are making the symbol of the Nazis, aren't you?

12. **Shades of Bassai-Dai.** - Look left, and step in that direction into a back stance and execute a sword hand block with the right hand. Step and perform another. Pause after each of these. Then, as in Bassai-Dai. step forward and perform one, then immediately step backward and perform another. Then, pivot into a front stance. Nakayama says do this with the left foot by stepping to the left about 14 inches. Kanazawa says do this by moving the right foot to the right about 14 inches, even though it is the right foot. Assume the reverse half front facing

position as you raise and then lower your hands in the tiger mouth posture. Raise the knee, and then drop a kick to knee level (no higher). This is exactly as Bassai-Dai. The only difference is that when you kick, you should pull both fists back so that the left fist is over the right and they are positioned as if they are holding a broomstick with the elbows out. Kiai on the kick.

13. **Two Armed Inside Block** - As you bring the knee back up from the kick, pivot 180° counter clockwise. Simultaneously fold both arms inward for an inside block right over left. When you step down, your right foot will be the rear foot of a back stance. When your foot lands, execute a double inside block by blocking outward with both arms.

    Just like Kanku Dai and Heian Nidan, the ties to Bassai-Dai here are usually so reflexive that the person trying to perform this kata will repeatedly revert back to Bassai-Dai. This is perfectly normal and should not be allowed to cause undo frustration.

14. **Upper Cuts** - Immediately shift forward about a foot by raising the left foot and pushing off with the right. Straighten the elbows upward and drive the fists forward in a snapping upper level underhanded punch. Immediately bring the elbows back down.

15. **Sweep Up This Mess** - Step forward into a horse riding stance with the right leg. Continue looking in the same direction. However, instead of just stepping, foot sweep with the right foot as you step, keeping the blade edge of the foot close to the floor as you sweep across, back, and upward all at the same time. The secret to the foot sweep is to think three-dimensionally. Don't just sweep sideways - also pull upward on the foot you are attacking. At the same time, outside block with the right hand. Focus the block and foot at the end of the sweep with the foot in the air. Then, quickly snap the right hand back to the waist and step into the horse riding stance as you punch with both arms across your body to the right.

16. **Bottom Fist** - Turn 180° without moving the feet and execute a left bottom fist strike to the rear shoulder height. Look as you snap to fold the arms in preparation to launch the strike.

17. **Stepping Punch** - Kiai as you step forward into a front stance and middle level punch with the right fist.

18. **Sweep Up the Rest** - Turn to the rear 180° counterclockwise. The turn is somewhat awkward. Execute the sweep and outside block leading into the double punch from above. The cross body punch is not a hook punch, but should be fully extended.

    Step again two more times performing this same technique.

19. **Finish** - Take the weight off of your left foot, turn 225 degrees to the rear, and bring the left foot back in the direction of the heel for about 1.5 feet. Then pull the foot inward toward you so that it becomes the front foot in a cat leg stance. At the

same time, reach outward with the left hand in a high level sword hand block. The right hand should be palm downward and open as well. As you pull the foot in the final foot or so, open the thumbs and make tiger mouths out of your hands. Bend the left arm at the elbow 90° and keep the right elbow straight so that the hands line up at the finish.

Step across with the left foot and mirror this same sequence on the right side. After you are done stance back up into the crossed-hands position that you began in by returning the left foot to the right.

Bassai-Sho



Kanku-Dai

Kanku-Dai is required learning in every school of Shotokan Karate. Further, it is required for competition in the second round of elimination, along with Jion, Enpi, and Bassai-Dai. These four kata together are considered to be the very core of Shotokan Karate kata, and they are frequently referred to as the "Big Four" in Japan. Obviously the biggest of the Big Four kata is Kanku-Dai. Kanku-Dai surprisingly contains many close combat techniques and throws which become apparent if you are looking for them.

Five Names - One Kata
The name Kanku is a combination of two characters. The first character is Kan - to view,



Kanku-Dai

see, or the noun "a view." The next character is Ku, it could represent many things: sky, emptiness, void, or air. The name Kanku is frequently translated as "To look at the sky." Other possible interpretations: Looking at the Emptiness and Sky Watching. There are a few other interpretations that follow along this same pattern.

Kanku-Dai

The word Dai means large. This kata is the larger of two kata. The other kata in this pair is Kanku-Sho, and it is believed to be a much younger version of this same kata. Together, Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho present the same pattern of movements in two different formats. Kanku-Sho is possibly a creation of Itosu, who, after practicing Kanku-Dai for years, attempted to create a version that more suited what he wished to practice. Kanku-Dai basically means, "Big Kanku."

Kanku-Dai has had five different names during its known history in Okinawa and Japan.

A legendary Chinese diplomat named Kung Siang Chung supposedly brought this kata from China or Okinawa. Other myths say that he created the kata. Others say that his student, Sakugawa, created the kata and named it after his teacher, Kung Siang Chung. The Okinawan way to pronounce the three kanji that make up the name Kung Siang Chung is Ku Shan Ku.

When Funakoshi brought this kata to Japan, he renamed it as part of his efforts to remove Okinawan culture from karate so that it would be more acceptable to the Japanese. He left the same three Chinese characters - Kung Siang Chung - in place, but pronounced them with the Japanese inflection. The kanji are pronounced Ko So Kun in Japan. So, the name the students of Funakoshi were taught was Kosokun.

The Kosokun name is still used by the Shito-Ryu clubs in Japan instead of the current name used in Shotokan circles. This is ironic considering that Shito-Ryu clubs refer to the Heian as the Pinan, which is an Okinawan pronunciation of those Chinese characters. Every Japanese style, it seems, randomly mixes Okinawan and Japanese pronunciations of kata names in their syllabus without any sort of standardization.

At some point the name Kosokun was abandoned in favor of the name Kanku, and the -Dai suffix was appended when the kata Kanku-Sho was brought into the Shotokan canon. Today we know these two kata as Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho. The Shito-Ryu style knows them as Kosokun-Dai and Kosokun-Sho.

Funakoshi's last work on karate is the English text of ***Karate-do Kyohan***. This text was translated from Japanese into English by Ohshima Tsutomu, the leader of Shotokan Karate of America. In that book, Ohshima translates the kanji for Kanku as Kwanku. Ohshima says that "Kwanku" is the Okinawan pronunciation of the Japanese word Kanku. Why did Ohshima translate this kata name using Okinawan pronunciation?

Funakoshi's books indicate he was trying to change the names of the kata from Okinawan to Japanese pronunciation. In *Ryukyu Karate Kenpo* and *Rentan Jutsu*, Funakoshi's first two books on the subject of karate, he used the name Kosokun for this kata. Why would he change the pronunciation from the Okinawan Kushanku to the Japanese Kosokun, and then change the name again to the Okinawan pronunciation of Kwanku instead of Kanku? That just doesn't make any sense, and it makes me suspicious that he never called the kata Kwanku.

It would be much simpler today if Funakoshi had left the original names of the kata intact, or if the Chinese names of the kata from China had been retained by the Okinawans so that we could see where they came from bibliographically. It is interesting

to note the differences of culture evident through the way that the cultural baggage of karate is rejected or accepted when the art is taught in a new geographical location. For example, the United States practitioners strongly resist the idea of using English translations of the kata names. Funakoshi assumed that the Japanese would prefer Japanese pronunciations.

It turns out that the Japanese, even while going to war with everyone around them, preferred the Okinawan names of the kata. Sochin, Wankan, and Chinte are all examples of kata that Funakoshi tried to rename that his students preferred to call by their Okinawan names. The Okinawans, by contrast, rejected the Chinese culture in everything that they were given. When the name of the kata is from China, the provincial people of Okinawa pronounced the Chinese names using their own language. They adapted everything to themselves. It seems that the farther karate has traveled from Okinawa, the more strongly the adherents believe that the original culture of their instructors should be preserved.

As a result, Kanku-Dai has had five names since 1921:



Kushanku -> Kosokun -> Kanku -> Kanku-Dai

|----> Kwanku

Fishermen's Stories

Kung Siang Chung is supposedly the name of a famous Chinese diplomat who traveled to Okinawa in the late 1700's. He is alleged to have lived in Shuri City and befriended Sakugawa, a noted expert of Okinawan fighting arts. This Chinese diplomat was allegedly trained very highly in the arts of his nation, and he taught Chinese boxing to Sakugawa, who taught it to his pupil Matsumura Sokon. Did Kung Siang Chung, the legendary Kushanku/Kosokun, create our modern-day Kanku-Dai? Or, did someone create Kanku-Dai from the Channan kata that Kung Siang Chung brought to Okinawa? Did this

Chinese diplomat really exist, or is he a metaphor for all of the Chinese diplomats living on Okinawa Island?

Because Okinawa used to pay homage to any large nation that happened to sail a warship into Naha port and demand tribute, there were many diplomats living on Okinawa from China and other nations of the Pacific. Legend tells us that Kung Siang Chung was a friend of Sakugawa, one of the earliest people identified as a karate expert on Okinawa in the family tree of Shotokan karate. Either Kung Siang Chung, Sakugawa, or his student Matsumura supposedly created the kata Kushanku and named it after Sakugawa's Chinese buddy.

As with most stories of the events on Okinawa before the 20th Century, this story too is presented to us by men currently teaching karate on that island. Stories like this are passed on by word of mouth only, and probably are only partially true. It is obvious that China had a large impact on Okinawa. It is also obvious that Korea, Japan, and Formosa (Taiwan) also influenced the culture of the island. Also obvious is that Okinawan karate consists of some kata that clearly originated in Southern Chinese martial-arts.

The three characters that make up Ku Shan Ku mean "Mr. Government Official" or “Mr. Diplomat.” That fact leads me to an interesting conclusion: More than likely, there never was a Kushanku who lived on Okinawa and worked as a diplomat. The name is a representation of diplomats who did live on Okinawa during the late 1700's and early 1800's. The legendary Kushanku is probably just symbolic of the Chinese living on Okinawa who were teaching the locals the fighting systems of China during their off-hours for fun.

Perhaps there really was a diplomat with this name. I really don't know, but I am suspicious of any name that roughly translates into something metaphorical. Perhaps he was called this as a term of endearment, and he really existed. Something smells fishy in the story of Kushanku.

Kanku-Dai is Big

Kanku-Dai is long. It contains 65 independent movements, and requires about 90 seconds to complete. That might not look like much on paper, but when you are at the three quarter mark in Kanku-Dai, you feel like you have been doing the kata for an hour. Kanku-Dai is the longest kata that style instructors teach their students.

Some people wrongly label Kanku-Dai the longest kata in all of karate. Suparinpei, a kata of Goju-Ryu, is 108 techniques long - almost twice as long as Kanku-Dai. Some Shotokan enthusiasts have learned the Goju-Ryu kata and pronounce its name using Japanese: Hyakuhachiho - 108 steps.

Kanku-Dai is considered representative of Shotokan Karate. Kanku-Dai displays some typical Shotokan techniques, and the kata was supposedly Funakoshi's favorite kata. He performed it during his demonstration for the Crowned Prince (Hirohito) in 1922. Basically, the entire kata is like a compilation of the Heian. Kanku-Dai is also a part of Shito-Ryu. Mabuni Kenwa, the founder of Shito-Ryu karate, was one of Funakoshi's fellow pupils under Itosu, and he learned the kata right along with Funakoshi. Strangely

enough, Funakoshi never mentions Mabuni in any of his writings. At any rate, the kata is very typical of Shotokan and Shito-Ryu karate.

The Root Kata
There is a more important reason for Kanku-Dai being such a prominent kata in the Shotokan system: It is the parent kata for the entire database of techniques of this system. It is the central point to which all other kata point.

Kanku-Dai contains many techniques seen in Shotokan Karate kata via the Heian kata. Kanku-Dai is considered very representative of Shotokan Karate, and the kata is revered as a repository of the most fundamental and important of Shotokan's technical practices. There are also many other unusual techniques alongside these primary movements. Kanku-Dai contains the exceedingly difficult two level kick which most Karate players never figure out. The two level kick is actually a kick to the middle level followed by another kick to the high level all within a single jumping action. However, most Karate players fudge this technique by raising the knee of one leg and kicking with the other.

Heian and Kanku-Dai
Kanku-Dai is the source kata for the Heian kata, it is said by some. These people point to the similarity of the Heian kata and Kanku-Dai. Since the Heian Kata act as a set of indexes to the techniques in Kanku, there is an obvious relationship. Perform a single technique in Kanku-Dai, find the same technique in Heian Godan, and you will see that Heian Godan shows more detail of how to perform the same technique or make an application out of it. The Heian and Kanku expand each other's techniques. They act as maps of each other.

None of this means that the Heian are the source of Kanku-Dai, however. Dr. Schmeisser is pointing to a kata of Chinese origin called "Channan" as the source kata for the Heian. The Channan kata, which I have not personally witnessed being performed, are said to be primordial Heian. Heian 1, 2, and 3 are supposed to be created from the first Channan kata while Heian 4 and 5 are taken from the second Channan kata.

If the Channan theory is true, then Kanku is probably also loosely based upon this kata, and the Heian and it are actually parallel developments that are different views of the same kata. The Heian could be the broken apart Channan kata, and Kanku-Dai could be the compilation of the two Channan kata into a single form with a central theme. Who knows, really? But it is fun to speculate.

Broken in Half
Have you noticed that Kanku-Dai flows along smoothly up until the last 1/3 of the kata? At that point, Kanku-Dai suddenly becomes choppy and asymmetrical. It is almost as if the kata is complete up until that point, but someone attached an additional section onto it. If this is true, then Kanku-Dai has suffered some abusive editing at someone's hands during its history. Perform the kata and see if you can see where the additional part is appended. I think the last technique was originally the inside blocks with the reverse punches. Look at Kanku-Sho. The last four techniques are the inside blocks with the punches. Shouldn't these two kata end in a similar fashion?

Many Versions

There are supposedly four versions of the Kushanku kata in the wild. Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho of Shotokan and Shito-Ryu are but two of the versions thought to be in existence. A third version is the Shiho Kosokun which basically looks like Kanku-Dai performed to the left instead of moving forward from the starting point. Shiho means "Four directions." This kata was created by Mabuni, founder of the Shito-Ryu style, so that he could practice Kosokun in a narrow space. Mabuni redirected some of the turns in the enbusen so that the kata would follow a narrow path to the left. This kata was created after the Shotokan system was already moving along. Why Shotokan students did not import this kata along with Nijushiho, Sochin, and Unsu when they were on a Shito-Ryu kata borrowing binge is unknown.

The fourth kata of the Kushanku series is Yara Kushanku. This version is apparently an interpretation of the Kushanku kata by a famous Okinawan named Yara. If you wish to see Yara Kushanku, simply open a copy of Shoshin Nagamine's *The Essence of Okinwan Karate-Do*. Some claim when the enbusen of the four kata are placed next to one another, they draw something very important on the floor - a navigational map of the constellations, but I don't believe that. The Yara and the Shiho versions came along much later than the original Kanku-Dai, as much as 300 years later. The history of the other two kata is not as mysterious as is that of Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho.

Time to Completion
When properly performed, Kanku-Dai requires about 70 to 90 seconds to complete. However, some competitors in tournaments have been known to compress this time down to little over a minute. As time passes by, the kata are becoming performed more and more quickly. Mostly, I think, this is because kata are becoming performance art rather than fighting practice. As we become a society that does not permit hand-to-hand combat in any situation, the usefulness of using the kata as a tool to learn combat applications becomes less popular. Also, the kata are so far removed from modern sparring methods that they have little if any relationship with sparring any longer. Practicing a kata as anything other than performance art is relatively unheard of within Shotokan organizations, and anyone trying to apply the techniques in the Shotokan kata to Shotokan punch/kick/sweep combat methods would be unsuccessful.

Symbols
The coolest thing about the kata Kanku-Dai, though, is that if you look at the enbusen, it appears to draw the kanji "hon" on the floor. Your footsteps trace this kanji out pretty clearly. What is even more interesting about this possibility, is that hon can mean book, main, source, root, or central. Is the very shape of the kata the key to passing down the fact that this is the root kata of our system and therefore the most important?



Hon

At some point you have to sit back and chuckle at the fact that so many Japanese have printed books showing the shape of this kata from above, but none have ever happened to notice that many of the kata enbusen look exactly like common Asian characters.

Also, the large circular motions at the beginning and end of the kata are supposed to be representative of the sky or the universe. You make a triangle with your hand, and you raise it up, representative of the sunrise. You then describe a large circle with your hands, the circle so often seen in Zen calligraphy - the Universe. Pay close attention to the first two and last motions.

Some people think that the opening movement of Kanku-Dai is representative of looking in a mirror. I think they are mixing up the imagery of Kanku-Dai with the opening motions of the kata Meikyo. If you were looking in a mirror during the beginning motions of Kanku-Dai, then when you finished raising it up you would break it in half. As anyone knows, that's seven years bad luck!

Mark Twain was right when he said that people over-analyze the creations of others and find symbols and meanings that the author did not intend.

Directions

1. **Look at the Sky** - From the relaxed natural stance, bring your left and right hands open with thumbs extended. Overlap your left fingers over your right. Your thumbs should overlap at the thumbnail. The middle fingers should also overlap at the nails. Your index fingers will overlap at the first joint. Don't touch your thumbs end to end. The hands should form a nice triangle. Likewise, do not

bend the wrists. Keep the wrists straight. Pause here for a moment.

Now, keeping the elbows straight, raise the hands up slowly. Keep the eyes looking straight forward. Do not start looking through the triangle until it passes eye level. Even though you are tempted to give yourself a bird's eye view through the triangle, keep your wrists straight. Raise the hands until your arms are 30 degrees short of straight up in the air. Be careful about the angle. You shouldn't bend backward to look up at the sky. The sky should be visible through your hands without pointing your triangular telescope straight up in the air. Move the arms into position slowly, but not too slowly, or you will bore everyone to death.

2. **Big Circle** - Part the hands and keep the elbows straight as you draw a wide circle with them. Slowly move both hands around the imaginary circle until they meet in front of your hips. Close your thumbs almost immediately upon parting the hands. Draw a wide circle, but not so wide that you are reaching behind you and stretching your chest forward. Some people like to part their hands explosively, bursting them apart and then slowing them down for the rest of their journey around the circle. This is not standard, but is becoming more common in tournament performances in Japan. If you do burst your hands apart, only move them fast for about 18 inches in each direction, then slow them down.

   When you bring your hands together, your right hand's blade edge will be placed lengthwise down and across the palm of your left hand. The right pinky nail should be over the end joint of the left index finger. The right palm heel is slightly inside and below the left palm heel. The thumbs should be contracted, not folded across the palm such that they appear to be stubby little nubs on the hands. Throughout this and all other open hand techniques, do not curve or curl the fingers of the hands. Try to expand your palms by stretching them open about as far as they go. Pause at the end of this technique.

   Did you just draw an inyo? The red part is the triangle, the big circle the rest? So maybe that's a little out-of-whack for a proper Inyo. Or was it a big Zen circle type of emblem? The thing has to mean something besides looking at the sky. You don't need a triangle to look up.

3. **Two High Level Back Hand Blocks** - From your current position, look to your left, and step so that the left foot becomes the front foot in a back stance. Since this is a back stance, don't move the torso forward, rather, simply lower yourself down by bending the right leg that will become the rear leg of the back stance, and shoot the left foot out as a brake.

   Simultaneously move the left hand directly from its current position into a high level inside block performed with the back of the open sword hand. The right hand moves directly to the position open and touching the torso below the chest at the top of the abdomen. Again, fingers are straight, and palms are flat.

   Now reverse positions into the mirror image. Neither of these blocks contains a folding action to prepare for the block. You simply move from where your hands are. While changing from one side to the other, the torso, this time, does move to the left as the left leg becomes the rear leg of the back stance, and the feet should

pivot on the heels. The timing of these two movements is continuous. The first technique is a snap, and the second has a pause after it -> 1-2.

4. **Shades of Bassai-Dai** - Fold right arm over the left, and place the left hand at the right hip. Pull the left foot in and stand up into the natural position. Move the vertical sword hand out with increasing slowness and increasing tension. After it is fully extended for a brief moment, quickly punch with the right hand without turning your hips or your shoulders. Immediately fold your arms for a right side inside block, but do not turn your hips. Step to the side with the left foot strongly assuming a moderate-depth front stance. Some people turn their front foot to the side, others try to keep both feet to the front. I recommend turning to the side. The stance you assume should be in-line, don't try to give it width by stepping back.

   As the foot lands, violently turn the hips and shoulders in synch with your block. It is extremely important that the hips turn with the block as you step. Do not fold the arms as you step, or you will lose the hip rotation from your blocking action. Keep your nose facing forward at all times. Turn your head to the right strongly to prevent cutting your eyes. Stand up quickly and mirror the action you just performed above exactly.

   Which kata had this motion first, Bassai-Dai or Kanku-Dai? I don't know. I refer to Bassai Dai here because I wrote these directions after the Bassai Dai directions, so in my mind, I'm sort of assuming you've read the Bassai Dai directions.

5. **Triangle Kick** - Step with the left foot out and forward at a 45° angle so that you place your foot at the third point of a triangle drawn from the two foot positions in the last technique. Do not slide the foot horizontally. Pull both hands to the left hip in a cup and saucer shape, and pull the right foot directly up to the left knee. Some people pull their right foot up to their left foot, and then they kick from there. Don't do that.

   Now that your foot is on your left knee make sure the right knee is pointing in the direction that you wish to kick. Extend the kick to your own shoulder level while simultaneously executing a right handed snapping back fist. Snap both the side snap kick and your back fist at the same time, bring the right foot back to the supporting knee strongly to focus in that position. Bring the back fist back to the right breast. Look to your left immediately.

   Fold the left arm over the right for a sword hand block. Fluidly step down into a back stance with the right leg as the rear leg. Block with the left hand as the right foot touches the floor and the rear knee settles into the stance.

6. **Three Swords and a Spear** - Pause for a moment, then step forward and sword hand block again. Pause again. Step forward with the left foot and hand and sword hand block. Without pausing, step forward with the right foot into a front stance and stab the right hand forward into a spear hand strike with the fingertips. The thumb should be folded in. The strike should be aimed inward toward the center of your own body. The left hand should be palm down and

immediately under the right elbow. The left elbow should be bent at 90° forming a nice rectangle between the two arms and the chest. Kiai on this technique.

7. **Title Theme** - Look over the left shoulder. Shift the left foot over so that it is ready to become the front foot in a left sided front stance. As you perform this shift, move the left open hand down as if to block to the lower level with a sword hand block, and place the open right hand up in the air with the elbow at a 90° angle as if about to perform an outside block. Continue shifting the weight and turn the hips to the reverse half facing posture. The shoulders should finish facing 45° to the left. The right arm should strike in a round trajectory to the neck nevel with the palm flat and facing upward. The left hand should be in an open palm block to the upper level. The right elbow should be bent at about 10 degrees, and the right hand should be parallel to the floor.

   Some people strike with the right hand moving in a forward motion toward the target rather than a rounded motion. In fact, this seems to be becoming more and more popular. The strike should be performed with a round trajectory.

   Front snap kick to your own chin height with the right leg, and as you snap the kick back and contract the muscles in the hamstring and calf strongly, pivot on the left leg to the rear. Fold the arms while the foot is still off of the ground so that the right is under the left, palm up, hand open. The left should be up over the right shoulder with the palm in toward the neck. Remember not to wrap your fingers around your neck, but rather keep them straight.

   As you set your foot down, assume the Swastika posture. The left arm is moved down into a downward block synchronized with the right arm being moved into an upper level inside block to the rear. There is a trick to doing this movement properly.

   Make sure that the right arm, while moving upward, takes a curved trajectory. Do not pull it away from your left side in a straight line. Instead, make the right fist travel in a diagonal arc away from your face so that your fist goes over your head and is never close to your head horizontally or vertically. Most people bend their right elbow too much and pull the fist under their chins.

   Fold the arms again as you did just before the swastika position, except this time shift your body weight forward into a front stance. Don't shift the front foot out to make room for the hips to rotate. Instead, just do the best that you can with that foot positioning. You won't be there long anyway.

   Draw the hands back and slowly make a downward blocking motion as you do. Pull the left foot back and change your stance from low to high as you straighten the both knees and assume an L stance. The heels should be in line. Many people prefer to keep there left foot so that only the ball is touching, however, that is not required.

   The timing for the strike, kick, swastika, fold, and pull back is 1..234..55555.

8. **Repeat Chorus** - Without turning to your rear, step forward with the left foot into a front stance and repeat the Title Theme.

9. **Side Snap Kicks and Elbows** - Mirroring Heian Yondan, from the down block position you are in now, pull the left leg up to the right knee. The left knee should point outward in the direction that you are going to kick. The left hand should be at the right waist in the cup and saucer position. Side snap kick to the left as you throw a left side back fist strike. Unlike the first back fist strike, don't snap this time. Rather, left the back fist out after you strike. Snap the kick back immediately, though, and step down into a front stance that has no width - the heel s are in line. Drive the right elbow into the left palm, which is now being pulled back from the back fist strike. The fist of the elbow-strike hand can be palm down or palm inward.

   Typically in Shotokan kata, when you throw a single side snap kick, the back fist is snapped. When you throw two side snap kicks followed by elbow strikes, the back fist is left hanging extended after the strike.

   Be careful not to bend at the waist when you throw the side snap kicks. Your shin, shoulder, hip, and knee should all form a straight line om target to chin upon the maximum extension of the kick.

   From this position, pull the right knee to the left leg, turn the head to the other direction, and throw the mirror image of this technique.

10. **Sword Hand Fan** - Immediately following the elbow strike, turn 180° and assume a back stance. Throw a left handed sword hand block. Step forward and to the right at 45° and throw a right sword hand block. Turn to the right, and re-chamber the hand, throwing another right handed sword hand block. Step forward and to the left at 45°, and throw another right handed sword hand block.

    Be careful to strongly and properly fold the arms for the sword hand block on each technique. Do not get sloppy because of the changing body dynamics caused by the different stepping and turning directions. Snap the head in the direction you are about to move quickly in a bird-like fashion between each step.

11. **A Clean Kill** - Pivot to the left and perform the strike-block combination with the open hands from the Title Theme of the kata. Front snap kick. As you step down, however, do not turn, but rather bring the left hand out in front of you with the open palm facing down at stomach level. The right fist should be somewhat behind the head, and right elbow should point from between the eyes. Pull the elbow down strongly as you lunge forward and plant the right foot, finishing by pulling the left foot forward into a crossed feet stance. This looks like a vertical back fist strike.

    Now step back with the left foot, and fold the arms for a right side inside block. As the hips are snapped to the side, block with the arms in synchronicity with the hips turning. Ideally, the stepping back, hips turning, and the blocking outward motion all happen simultaneously. Be careful to keep the nose pointed forward as you rotate the hips. Now throw two punches quickly, the first one snapping

and the second one a thrust punch.

The rhythm of these techniques decreases with each technique you throw. The pause between the initial strike and the following front kick should be the longest pause in the sequence. The following techniques have less time between each, until finally the two punches have no time between them. 1....2...3..4.5.

12. **Duck and Cover** - Pivot in place on both feet, looking 180° to your rear. Pull the right hand from its punching position so that it raises up into an uppercut type of motion with the top of the fist even with the top of the head. The left arm leaves the hip and meets the right wrist half-way, applying a reinforcing action to the right wrist with the open left palm. The tip of the left middle finger should be even with the right wrist, and the left hand should be stiff and flat, not wrapped around the shape of the right arm.

    As you perform the upper cut with the right hand, lift the right knee strongly into the chest and straighten the left knee.

    Just as fast as you raised up, now duck. Drop forward, with the left foot in place, putting both palms on the floor. Your hands should point inward so that they form a large triangle. Your front foot need not be flat on the floor, and your front knee is bent extremely deeply. The left leg is straight, and the left foot is turned to the side and on the floor.

13. **Two Sword Hands** - From that position, stand up and pivot to the left into a very deep back stance and throw a left side lower level sword hand block. Next, step forward and throw a middle level sword hand block.

    Usually, this is the exact point when you begin to wonder if this kata will ever end, and it is also the point when you slow down to about 80% effort. This is where you want to give yourself a psychological boost so that you are not simply trying to finish, but rather are pushing very hard to look as you did in the very first techniques.

14. **Inside blocks and punches** - Turn 270° by pulling in the left foot to the right, pivoting to the left, and then stepping out with the left into a front stance. Throw an inside block, pause for just a moment, and then throw a reverse punch.

    Now move the right foot to the right as you turn right 180° so that it becomes the front foot of a right side front stance. Throw a right handed inside block, pause, and then throw two middle level punches - the first one a snap, the next a thrust.

15. **Who's Making This Stuff Up?** - I think these techniques are appended onto the end of the kata by someone back in history. Up to this point, the kata has been very balanced. When it moved left and right, there were always mirror image techniques. When it moved straight up and back, the techniques were long, large, and usually involved stepping actions. From this point forward, the kata becomes, short, extremely variable, and choppy.

16. **Side Snap Kick** - Pick the right foot up, move the right fist to the left waist, and then side snap kick and back fist to the right side simultaneously. Snap the back fist back to the right breast, and then step down with the right foot, making it the rear foot in a left back stance. As you land sword hand block with the left hand - make sure to fold the arms before you set the foot down.

17. **Spear Hand** - Step forward into a front stance and execute a middle level spear hand as you did back during the first kiai. This set of three techniques, finishing with this one, is a sort of mini-version of the first batch of techniques in the beginning of the kata.

18. **Anti-Jujutsu** - Escape from a wrist lock. Move the right open hand up so that the elbow bends at a 90° angle and the fingers point at the ceiling. Rotate the right wrist so that the right palm points to the right. The wrist should turn counter-clockwise. Pivot on the right foot as you step forward with the left foot and turn counter clockwise. As you step out with the left foot, you should finish into a horse riding stance. As you turn, raise the entire arm assembly over your head. As you begin to finish, pull the right hand down and back into a draw hand. The left arm should come down vertically in a back fist strike (no snap) from above. Shift to the left six inches and change the left arm into a bottom fist strike as a second, whippy technique. Leave the arm out.

    Whether or not you fold the arms prior to this last movement is entirely optional.

19. **Shades of Tekki** - Pull the left arm back, open the palm. Strike with a right elbow strike into the left open palm. Twist at the waist, but do not allow the knees to move, collapsing the stance. After the strike, immediately pull both hands to the left waist in a cup and saucer action. Look to the right, and down block with the right arm to the right side from this horse riding stance position.

20. **Circular Bell Ringing** - Raise the right arm up as if doing an upper block, but bring the fist around a little so that it comes in from the left side. Pivot to the right so that the hips are fully facing the right side as you step up. Pull the left knee up into the chest as you step. Continue turning and stepping until you stomp down into a horse riding stance facing the opposite direction. As you stomp, reverse your arm positions. Both fists should be moved around the torso drawing a big circle. The upper block is more of a round punch, and the down block is actually a scooping inside block to the lower level. It is important these two techniques draw this circle.

    As you draw up the knee, be careful to turn, lift, lower, and continue turning. If you lift, turn, then lower the knee, you'll be pivoting swinging your leg around. Keep the action tight like an ice skater's spin.

    Punch straight down with the right fist downward and inside of the scoop block so that your arms cross at the wrists. This looks like an X-block in a photo, but it isn't, is it?

21. **X-Block** - Now comes the X-Block. Stand up by pulling both feet inward to the natural posture quickly as you straighten the knees. Shoot both hands upward in

their fixed position, but open them on the way up. A strange rule of Shotokan Karate kata is that X-blocks are fists to the lower level and are open sword hands to the upper level. Bend your elbows at 120° and do not straighten them further. Look at your wrists - keep them straight. For some reason, there is a tendency to bend them upward. The shoulders should also be open to 120° upward.

22. **Crunch!** - Pivot on the right foot and turn to the right by stepping forward with the left foot. Continue looking around until your forward stepping left foot is now stepping backward and settling in to be the rear foot of a front stance. As you settle in, pull the hands down and ball them into fists.

23. **Two Level Kick** - Push off with the right leg as you lift and kick with the left leg to the middle level. Continue rising into the air (hope it was a good push) and now kick with the right leg to the upper level. Most people try to turn this into a knee raise and a single jumping kick. There should be two kicks performed in air - middle and high. Hold the fists in the X position without tensing your shoulders or arms as you throw the two kicks.

24. **Vertical Elbow Strike** - The left foot will land first, then the right. Before the right foot lands, fold for the vertical back fist/elbow strike you did before. Finish into a front stance and perform the strike. Kiai.

25. **Will It Ever End?** - Pause for a moment, and then scoop inside outward to the low level across the knees with the right arm as you pivot on the right foot and turn around 180° into a natural stance. Don't bend over at the waist. Straighten the knees as you finish the turn, and then raise the left hand from the hip as well so that both hands are headed upward drawing a wide circle with the elbows straight. Cross the arms at the wrists overhead, and then uncross them about chin height, drawing another inyo. Now lower the arms into the natural position.

Kanku-Dai



Kanku-Sho

Possibly one of Itosu's creations, Kanku-Sho contains many of his typical double punches and stick controlling actions. Throughout the kata that were created by Itosu, several distinct themes are apparent. One of these themes is the double punch. For some reason, all of the kata that Itosu is supposed to have created or heavily modified seem to contain a double armed punch thrown to the side from a horse riding stance. This technique is interpreted by Dr. Schmeisser as an "Istanbul Twist" - a technique where you grab your opponent by the head and twist his neck violently while flinging him to the side.

観空小

Kanku-Sho

Itosu's supposed preference of attacking the middle section of the body is present in this kata. While Kanku-Dai contains techniques which generally go to the upper level, the kata of Itosu show him as a pragmatist among kata creators, preferring instead to pound an opponent to death by way of the mid section. In Kanku-Sho, the mid section is attacked continuously, with the kata virtually ignoring attacks to the face and neck. Although the kata does not present a balanced strategy in keeping with collected information about fighting, the middle level attacks are all-purpose, and they could easily be thrown to any target. Middle level techniques are the very core of karate training.

Originally, the double arm blocks at the very beginning of the kata are thought to have been performed to the upper level, however, they have since been modified (by Funakoshi Yoshitaka?) to the middle level. Also modified are the side snap kicks, which appear as a valid technique sometime in the 1940's. Oddly enough, Shotokan's side snap kick is rarely seen in any other system, and it is heavily doubted by large numbers of Shotokan instructors as a valid and effective fighting technique.

The stepping punches that quickly withdraw into inside blocks is stolen directly from the opening sequence of a quite a few Goju-Ryu style kata - in particular Sanchin, Suparinpei, and Seisan come to mind.

Non-Athletes Need Not Apply

For less experienced Karate players, Kanku-Sho presents a true challenge. It is filled with sequences of jumping and ducking, spinning, and complex multiple technique combinations. Many of the throwing actions in Kanku-Dai are here, but on a smaller scale. The largest difference between Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho is the timing between the different applications. For example, in Kanku-Dai there is heavy reliance upon multiple counters following a blocked attack. While this is one strategy, there are more effective ways of utilizing timing for the expert. In Kanku-Sho, there are many sequences where blocking, sweeping, throwing, and countering are all executed in a single movement. This is a strategy quite familiar to the advanced students' repertoire. Kanku-Sho is a definite diversion from Kanku-Dai and other kata as far as timing of application is concerned.

Unfortunately for some, Kanku-Sho contains movements which older or less athletic Karate players may find impossible to ever perform with any skill at all. For example, there are two challenging jumps within the kata. Although a raw performance and understanding of the kata can be gained by the less athletically endowed, younger, stronger Karate enthusiasts will benefit more from study of this kata since they will better perform the many advanced level techniques it contains. This difficulty does not seem fair to many less athletic individuals who claim that the kata is flashy of little value. However, that is exactly what makes the kata so fascinating for those who can perform those movements. Kanku-Sho challenges even the kata specialist to use all of his talent to the absolute maximum.

Little Kanku

Kanku-Sho is smaller than Kanku-Dai. and it requires less time to perform. Also, many of the techniques in Kanku-Sho are on a smaller scale meaning that the hands and feet literally travel in smaller patterns. Thus, Kanku-Sho is "Little Kanku" as the name

suggests. Even though the kata is shorter and requires less time to perform, many experts report that Kanku-Sho tires them more than the bigger kata, therefore suggesting that it is more energy intensive and anaerobic.

When the heck should I kiai?
There is controversy among even the highest ranking Shotokan experts as to the proper placement of the kiai. The third punch, the jump, the stick grabbing motion, and the last punch are all used by various individuals as points for kiai. However the kiai are placed, it is usually an unwritten rule in Shotokan Karate circles to never emit more than two kiai during any single kata performance. That rule is an arbitrary standard that they developed to prevent kata performance from becoming a tacky display of kiai madness as seen in some modern tournaments where good taste is flung out the window.

So, where do the kiai go? Depending upon the instructor, you will get a different answer. Kanazawa, Nakayama, and others all differ on the placement of the mysterious kiai of Kanku-Sho. Unfortunately, there is no guiding rule for kiai placement in Kanku-Sho for instructors, but students may rely on their instructor's choice for best placement. Keep in mind, however, that your instructor will probably move the kiai around as he becomes interested in different publications about the kata and experiments with personal preference.

I prefer placing the kiai at the third punch and the very last punch in the kata. I think the potential for creativity that the kata represent is wasted in the controlled atmosphere through which they now make their way from person to person. I can see wanting to prevent a kiai frenzy such as some of the kata seen in open competitions, but dictating the placement of the kiai perhaps removes some interesting lessons and potential for development for many people. Kanku-Sho is free from that restriction. Place the two kiai where you like, or perform three. The rule, if we can really call it that, is there to prevent you from performing ten or twenty kiai while doing a kata. The difference between two and three is insignificant, in my opinion.

Modern Performance Confusion
Another controversial point in Kanku-Sho is the lower block that is performed slowly in a "T" stance. Unlike Kanku-Dai, this motion was originally a downward strike, and it utilized a downward arcing action rather than a sideways blocking action. At one tournament, then I watched an argument between three judges in which they debated whether the technique should be a downward strike or a downward block. The action seems to change from dojo to dojo. Performing the technique as a strike seems to be the original action. The block is a modern change in the performance of Kanku-Sho which apparently did not meet with resounding acceptance. Individual choice for the expert is probably the safest route at present.

Four Kanku Kata
Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho have been through several different names over time. In Okinawa, they were originally called Kushanku. The Kanji that make up the name Kushanku are pronounced Koshokun or Kosokun in Japanese, depending on who you ask.

Kanku-Sho

In addition to Shotokan's Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho, there is also a Shiho Kosokun kata practiced in Shito-Ryu. That kata is reputed to be the creation of Kenwa Mabuni - the founder of that style and a contemporary of Funakoshi Gichin. The kata looks like a combination between Kanku Dai and Kanku-Sho that goes off to the left side. There is also a version of Kanku that still carries the original name of Kushanku. Yara Kushanku, Kushanku, Kushanku Sho, and Shiho Kushanku are the four Kanku kata.

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - This kata is like Hangetsu, Sochin, Gojushiho, Meikyo, Wankan and Gankaku - it has no particular opening flash and trash of its own. Simply stand with the feet about hip-width apart with the toes pointed out a little. The hands should be in relaxed fists, and the arms should be relaxed by the side of the body.

   Some people try to create drama when assuming this position by stiffening their arms and pointing them forward toward the floor ram-rod straight. I don't see the point of this. The whole purpose of the posture is to emulate how you might be standing facing an opponent. It is not a technique of its own, and it is not a pose.

2. **Three Double Arm Blocks** - The first three techniques are performed in quick 1-2-3 timing with each other. Look left while stepping to the right so that the right leg becomes the rear leg of a new back stance. Reach to the right side as you begin the motion so that the left fist is pointed at the right shoulder and the right fist pointing at the left elbow. As you set the foot down, perform a choppy inside block motion with the left arm while pressing the right fist against the inside of the left forearm down by the elbow. The part of the right fist that touches is the bottom fist side with the little finger - not the knuckle side. The left foot will slide backward no more than 4 to 6 inches as a result of your zooming backward into a back stance.

   Look to the right, and slide to the left performing the mirror image of what you just did: double arm block in a retreating back stance.

   Look to the left 90° angle, where you were facing to begin with, and slide to the right, making another left side double arm block as you slide into this back stance with the right leg as the rear leg.

3. **Stepping Punches** - Step forward with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot in a new front stance. As you step, throw a middle level punch. Here a little confusion exists about how to proceed next. You are supposed to pull your fist back, unrotating it as you drop your elbow forming a completed inside block posture with your right arm. Should you snap the punch to do this? Do you thrust the punch and then relax the arm? Should you try to snap the second part where you drop the elbow?

   Most people seem to thrust the punch, but for a very short time, relaxing the arm

almost immediately without any snapping action during the elbow drop. The same confusion over the petty details of this technique exist within Goju-Ryu. Watch a few guys doing Seisan or Sochin for a while, and you will see that some leave the fist out for a moment while others snap the technique so quickly that they barely complete the punch after performing it.

Step forward again and repeat with the left foot and left hand.

Step forward a third time and punch and kiai. Don't relax the elbow this time. This set of three techniques is strangely related to the Seisan, Sochin, and Sanchin kata that are practiced in Goju-Ryu, but has been heavily modified from their original nature. Perhaps Itosu borrowed these techniques from those kata.

4. **Grasping Block** - This is not the scooping hand technique called the Tiger Mouth in Bassai Dai. This is a slightly different technique. Turn 180° by pivoting to the left on the right foot. The left foot should move about 3 feet to the left so that it opens up the hips and becomes the front foot of a new front stance to the rear. Turn the hips reverse half front facing.

   Place the left hand across the right wrist. The left thumb should be across the top as well. Raise the hands with the palm of the right hand facing inward in a steep arm up to your own forehead level. As you reach the top of the arc, rotate the wrist so that the right palm faces outward and the right thumb is outward. Slowly lower the elbow to the right side of the body, decelerating and adding tension as you finish the technique.

5. **Front Snap Kick** - Explosively pull both hands back, squeezing the right fist closed as you do, and throw a right side front snap kick to the middle level.

6. **Vertical Back fist** - Step down from the kick with the right foot in front and bring the left foot up behind it into a crossed-leg stance. As you step down, reach forward with the left open hand in a vertical sword hand block posture, but think of it as if you are pushing someone or grabbing for one of their limbs. Either way it works great. Reach up over your head with your right fist, keeping your right elbow in pretty close. The fist should be a vertical fist, and it should be over the crown of your head. As you step down, draw the left arm strongly, and bring hte fist down rotating into a back fist strike so that it finishes with the knuckles even with the throat in the centerline of the body.

7. **Inside Block and Two Punches** - Step back from the crossed-leg stance with the left foot so that it becomes the rear foot in a new front stance. The right knee should have already been in proper depth, so it doesn't move. Turn the hips to the side as you execute a right armed inside block. Fold for the block, and then step backward strongly as you open the hips to the side and move the arm at the same time.

   After that, throw a double punch. The first punch is fast and snapped, the next is strong and thrusted.

   The timing of these techniques, from the slow tiger mouth to the two punches is a

collapsing timing. Each successive technique has less pause in front of it as you go. The timing for the whole sequence is 1----2---3--4-56

8. **Inside and Down Block** - Pivot on the right foot to the rear 180°, sliding the left foot from the right to the left about 14 inches so that it becomes the front foot of a new back stance. Fold the arms as you move, and then burst them apart so that the left performs a down block over the left knee. The right arm performs an inside block at a 90° angle (perpendicular) to the downward block. The right arm will be sticking out to the right while all of the other joints are in a nice line.

9. **Downward Strike** - Slowly stand up on the right leg, pulling the left leg back to it until the heels are about a foot length apart. Some people pull the leg back on the ball of the foot, while others pull it back sliding the whole thing flat on the floor. The left arm can be lowered down into a downward block trajectory or it can be lowered in an arcing, overhand motion so that the second row of knuckles strikes downward.

   The series of techniques from the grasping hand block to the downward strike is the main sequence.

10. **Main Sequence Repeat** - Step out with the left foot and repeat the main sequence.

11. **Swastika Block and Two Punches** - Step left into a back stance so that the left foot is the front foot. Lower level block with the left hand and inside block to the upper level with the right hand behind you. This is the swastika posture.

    Shift the left foot to the left a little and rearrange yourself into a horse riding stance facing to the right. As you do this, bring both hands back to the right side in fists. Punch with both hands across the torso to the left as you shift. The left arm will be straight out from the shoulder. The right arm will be straight but across the top of the stomach. The shoulders turn, but the hips do not. Twist at the waist to bring both punches into range. The left arm will, of course, reach much farther than the right.

12. **Repeat** - Turn to the right and repeat this two technique sequence. Block, then punch as you shift into a horse riding stance to the right.

13. **Two-handed Stick Block** - Shift into a right side back stance to the front by pulling the left heel to the right, and then stepping forward with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot in a new back stance. Right hand open palm turned upward at low level, left open palm turned upward at high level as if catching a stick, step forward and move the hands into position using a circular motion.

14. **Stab with the Stick** - Shift forward about six inches in your back stance. As you shift, close both hands into fists, and then rotate the wrists as you stab downward with both of them. When you are finished, your left hand will be in front of your navel while the right hand will be extended forward to the low level.

15. **Jumping Sword Hand Block** - Your goal: Jump straight up in the air and make a 360 degree turn and then land in a back stance with a perfectly timed sword hand block to the middle level. After the stabbing action, reach with the right hand over the left shoulder to fold for the sword hand block. Look to the rear, and leap up off of the left foot as straight up as possible. The pictures in some books make it look like you should jump straight up off of both feet, but don't bother. No one can jump well that way. While you are in the air, tuck your knees and feet up under you tightly. When you land, execute the sword hand block.

16. **Side Snap Kicks and Elbows** - Mirroring Heian Yondan, from the back stance you are in now, pull the left leg up to the right knee. The left knee should point outward in the direction that you are going to kick. The left hand should be at the right waist in the cup and saucer position. Side snap kick to the left as you throw a left side back fist strike. Unlike the first back fist strike, don't snap this time. Rather, leave the back fist out after you strike. Snap the kick back immediately, though, and step down into a front stance that has no width - the heels are in line. Drive the right elbow into the left palm, which is now being pulled back from the back fist strike. The fist of the elbow-strike hand can be palm down or palm inward.

    Typically in Shotokan kata, when you throw a single side snap kick, the back fist is snapped. When you throw two side snap kicks followed by elbow strikes, the back fist is left hanging extended after the kick snaps back until the elbow can come out to meet the hand.

    Be careful not to bend at the waist when you throw the side snap kicks. Your shin, shoulder, hip, and knee should all form a straight line target to chin upon the maximum extension of the kick.

    From this position, pull the right knee to the left leg, turn the head to the other direction, and throw the mirror image of this technique.

17. **Part of Main Sequence** - Turn to the left by pivoting on the feet. This will not produce a very nice front stance, so some people adjust their left foot to form it up a little. Others prefer to leave it wide open as in Heian Yondan before the front snap kick. It's up to you or your instructor.

    Perform the grasping hand block in reverse half-facing position, the kick, the back fist, the inside block, and the two punches as in the main sequence.

18. **Jump and Duck** - Just to make sure that no one over the age of 35 will ever perform this kata and be satisfied with it, another difficult jump appears at this point. Look over the left shoulder to the rear. Fold the left open hand under the right armpit as you reach with the right arm to the rear in a folding action. You can either extend the back hand block directly to the rear, or you can lean forward and extend the arm up at an angle behind you. Again, this is more of a personal preference.

    Decelerate and add tension in the open hand sweeping behind you. Before it can

stop moving, turn 180° to the rear and leap off of the left foot as you crescent kick into the hand with the sole of the right foot. After connecting, (most people never do connect) continue rotating until you land 180° to the rear. Your posture will be that of a ridiculously deep front stance with your hands on the floor just in front of your right foot. The hands should be in a triangle with the fingers pointing to the same spot about 1 foot in front of them.

This technique was not originally a jumping, spinning technique. Looking at the kata in Shito-Ryu, instead a quick spin and duck is all that is performed. However, with the advent of tournament kata competition, it was inevitable that anything that could be flourished would be, and this technique is such a change recently made. If you started Karate a little later than some, you might wish to take a look at how Shito-Ryu performers do their Karate kata.

19. **Switch Feet** - Stand up and switch feet by quickly trading their places. Execute a downward sword hand block as your feet plant themselves. The rhythm of this and the last technique should be 1-2. When you land, your feet will bang against the floor. There should be another such bang immediately after it as you bounce right back up and switch feet and block.

20. **Sword Hand Block** - Step forward into a back stance and sword hand block to the middle level with the right hand.

21. **Inside block Stepping Punch** - Turn 270° to the right counter-clockwise by pivoting on the right foot until you are in a new front stance with the left foot forward. Execute a left inside block as you turn. Step forward and punch to the middle level after the block.

    Turn 180°, look over the right shoulder, and step with the right foot, pivoting on the left, until you are facing to the right in a right front stance. Inside block with the right hand, and then step forward and punch middle level with the left hand. Kiai on this technique.

    The timing for the final five techniques is 1--2-3-4-5. Do the blocks and punches evenly. Don't flow them together into pairs. The hardest transition will be between the first punch and the second inside block. As you step across, you will have to move very quickly to keep an even rhythm.

22. **Finish** - Pull the front foot, the left foot, back to the left and stand up in the natural position to finish.

Kanku-Sho



Jion

The name Jion is of unknown origin. There are claims that the name comes from a temple named Jion-Ji, which literally means Jion Temple. While living in Japan, looking at a local map of the area I was in I saw that there must be a hundred temples in Japan that go by that name, so the reference is not very specific or informative.

What does the name Jion mean, and where does it come from? No one knows. There are many different ways to write the word Jion. Some of them are presented here for consideration as possibilities.

慈恩

Jion – "Mercy of Love"

Ji can mean universal love, tender, gentle, and loving. On can mean grace, favor, benevolence, or kindness. Supposedly a Buddhist term listed in some ancient texts which no longer is used in modern conversation. Some try to use this to tie Jion back to China. But, there are a bunch of temples in Japan named Jion. Many of them use the same kanji spelling for their names. Jion as a temple name is as common as people named Jones. Because the name is so common, even if Jion were named after a temple, we would never be able to figure out which one.



Jion – "Temple Sound"

Or, Ji can be the character for temple, and the second character can be sound. Thus, the meaning could be the sound of the temple bell ringing.



Jion – "Mercy of the Temple"

Ji could also be used to mean temple in combination with the character for mercy, showing perhaps the historical concept of seeking sanctuary within the walls of a temple as Musashi did at Kanchi'in in Kyoto.

Big Heart
Jion is a large scale and simple kata. Most of the techniques contained within the kata are very familiar to any karate player who might be advanced enough to begin learning Jion. There are generally only single technique/step combinations, and the pattern that the entire kata follows is actually quite simple. If one has mastered the Heian and the Tekki, performing Jion is not very difficult. Although somewhat more subtle than the Heian in its rhythm, Jion presents no serious obstacles to trainees. Jion is a favorite kata of people who aren't very good at kata. When you see Jion chosen in a tournament, you can be pretty sure that person is not a kata enthusiast.

The Shotokan version of Jion is changed from the Shito-Ryu version significantly. For example, the wedge block motions (moves 2 and 7) have been changed from cat stances to front stances for the purposes of Shotokan. Also, all of the square stances have been modified into horse riding stances. Some techniques previously performed in a front stance using turning have been changed to horse riding stance techniques performed to the side.

Big Four
Jion is number three of the Big Four Kata. The Big Four are Bassai Dai, Kanku Dai, Jion, and Enpi. These four kata are considered the standard Shotokan kata by international inter-style competition organizations. When competing in a style tournament, the performer will be required to perform compulsory kata (shitei) in progressive rounds. The first round consists of Heian and Tekki 1. The judge chooses a kata, and the performer performs that kata alongside his opponent. The judges choose the man with the best kata, and then the other person is eliminated. The second round of competition is always compulsory Big Four Kata. The judge chooses from the Big Four and the competitors perform that kata side by side. The loser is then eliminated. Jion is required learning for anyone planning on competing in kata competitions in style tournaments such as the World Shoto Cup.

These kata are also the group that a trainee can choose from to perform as a tokui kata during an examination for first degree black belt. You may pick which of them you wish to perform as a specialty kata and then perform that kata. For 2nd dan black belt, you are generally required to know all four of these kata, as the examiner is permitted to choose any of the Big Four as your compulsory kata.

The Three Respect Kata
Jion, Jiin, and Jutte are often grouped together as the Three Respect Kata. The reason for this is that Jion, Jutte, and Jiin begin and end with the performer holding his right fist under his left palm - a Chinese martial arts greeting frequently seen in your typical low-budget Kung Fu movie. Whether this is some action that was performed as the opening sequence in all of the Tomari-style kata is unknown. It is possible that this posture was performed by a particular person who helped develop all three of these kata a long time ago. The posture could simply be left over as if it were part of the kata, rather than his personal way of bowing.

Other kata begin with this covered fist action. Bassai Dai and Enpi both contain the covered fist at varying placement points at their beginning and end. In Bassai Dai, the right fist is placed inside the left hand, but the hands are lowered to the front of the lower abdomen. Enpi begins like this as well, but the fist and hand are at the left waist.

The covered fist action is described by some as being Chinese in origin. Whether or not this is the case is difficult to know. Since the Okinawans acquired some of the kata from China, it is not unreasonable to assume that the covered fist posture originated as a Chinese act of etiquette for beginning training. Rather than being left over from a particular Okinawan instructor, the fist-in-hand gesture may be from China.

Different Names - Same DNA
I think that Jion, Jutte, and Jiin are the same kata. Like Kanku Sho, Kanku-Dai, and

Shiho Kosokun, the Three Respect Kata are the same kata taking different shapes due to being passed down through different paths. Finally, the rivers of these kata spill out into the same waters: Shotokan. Back together again, they are treated as if they are different kata teaching different things. However, in reality, it seems that the three kata are teaching the exact same things, using the same techniques, stepping the same way, doing nothing different from one another at all. One kata - three versions.

The evidence to support the single kata theory is easily demonstrated. Jion and Jutte contain the same techniques. In Jion, there are the three stepping palm heel strikes. These strikes also live in Jutte. They live in Jiin as well, but with palms turned a little upward, they become sword hand strikes and are difficult to recognize as the same techniques. Jion contains the three stomping forearm blocks. Jutte does also - but they are outside blocks to the upper level - the Mountain Posture. They are the same technique, but with a different perspective.

Given the strong evidence that the three kata are the same kata in different versions of itself, which came first? I think Jutte came first, Jion came second, and Jiin is actually the most modern of the three having been created as a sort of "Sho" form of Jion which reached back to Jutte for some of its source material.

This is great news for people who practice Shotokan karate who think that they will not be able to wrap their brains around different versions of Bassai, Kanku, or other kata from other styles. If you have learned these three, you have already learned to differentiate between three versions of the exact same kata.

Jion is by far the most popular of the three kata, since it falls within the Big Four. Everyone eventually learns this kata while they are at brown belt.

Aggressive and Different
Jion is unique among the kata in a couple of regards. Jion is one of the few kata in karate in which block/counter combinations are executed while advancing forward. Jion introduces a set of techniques which are especially obvious in their combat effectiveness.

Directions

1. **Fist in Hand** - Stand with both feet touching from ball to heel with the toes forward. The knees should be straight. The left hand should be over the right fist. The elbows should be pointed down and no wider than the sides of the body, and the tallest knuckle on the left hand should be directly in front of the chin. Do not bend the wrists and point the elbows out sideways. Instead, keep the elbows in pretty close to the sides of the body and the wrists straight.

2. **Let's Go!** - Jion, unlike some kata, does not begin with a dramatic and demonstrative hand waving exercise or painfully slow execution of some incomparable posture. Jion gets right down to business. Step backward with the left foot so that it becomes the rear foot of a right front stance. Do not move the torso to the rear as you do this. Simply bend the right knee, shoot the left foot backward, and lower the torso in place. Do this very suddenly and explosively. At the same time, unfold the hands from their positioning and down block with the

left hand as you inside block with the right hand. These arm actions are not preceded by folding or crossing of the arms. Simply burst them into place, and focus the arm actions with action of planting the left foot. Your body should suddenly be in motion, and then should come to a halt like a bird flying into a window.

3. **Wedge Block** - Step to the left 45° angle with the left foot so that you are in another front stance. The first half of the step should be pretty fast. As you move the foot forward and touch it to the floor, decelerate considerably so that your weight settles into the stance gently. As the feet cross, bring the fists up in front of your eyes about one foot away. The palm sides should be facing inward and the arms should be crossed at the wrists. Turn the wrists as you pull your elbows down to your sides to perform a wedge block. The action of bringing the hands up should be extremely fast, in time with the first part of the stepping motion. Parting the arms and performing the block should start with a very small burst of speed, and then lose speed and gain tension as you move.

4. **Kicking and Punching** - Keeping your arms in the same position relative to your body, step forward and throw a right front snap kick to the middle level. As the foot touches the floor, a right middle level punch should be focusing. The punch is launched from the wedge block position of the arms. Do not pull back the right hand into a chambered position before throwing the punch. The timing for these two techniques is very quick with no pause between them. Pause after you throw the punch for just a moment.

5. **Double Punch** - Throw two punches from your current position. Do not try to consciously wiggle your hips to power up the punches. Your hips should stay square to the front facing position. The first punch should be fast and snapped, the second punch is strong and thrusted. There is no time between the two punches. The kick and punch section and this form a rhythm of 1-2----1-2. Most people ruin this part of the kata by turning their hips when they punch, pausing too long between punches, or by throwing all three punches in a row 1-2-3. Don't do that.

6. **Repeat as Necessary** - Snap your head to the right 90° and them step in that direction first quickly then slowly to perform a wedge block. Perform the exact mirror image of everything you just did from the wedge block to the double punch above. Pause after the last punch.

7. **Upper Block Reverse Punch** - Pivot on your right foot to the left 45° until you are in a left front stance again. During the first half of this pivot, draw the left arm back while you upper block with an open-handed covering action with the right hand. During the second half of the pivot, complete the upper block by blocking upward from the chambered position you are in. Draw the right arm back now. Your foot should land in time with the focus of the second blocking action. Actually, the whole movement is just a single upper block. It is pretty standard in Shotokan circles to perform an open-handed covering action before throwing the upper block, and it is especially common in Shotokan kata. As soon as the upper block completes, bring the right hip forward by straightening the right leg to rotate the hips to front facing as you throw a right reverse punch to

the middle level. All three motions should have very fast timing 1-2-3. Pause after the punch.

8. **Upper Block and Punch Again** - Step forward with the right foot. As you step the feet together, you should draw back the right arm and be upper blocking with the left hand open in a sword hand as in the last sequence. As you complete the step, upper block with the right hand using a fist, and then reverse punch quickly on the left side performing the mirror image of the above technique.

9. **Upper Block and Stepping Punch** - Step forward with the left foot again and upper block with the two motions as above. As soon as the block is finished, step again strongly and throw a middle level punch with a kiai.

   The rhythm of these techniques performed in this particular direction is 1-2-3---1-2-3---1-2-3.

10. **Swastika Posture** - Turn 270° while pivoting on the right foot. Be careful during this pivot to keep the torso erect. Most people tend to stick their rears out and bend forward during this turn. The other hideous habit that you don't want to acquire is that of reaching with the foot before you actually turn. Some people, even Kanazawa teaches this way, instead of pivoting completely and then stepping out, bend forward at the waist, stick their foot behind them, and then try to pivot on both feet to twist around and complete the turn. Don't do that. When you turn 270° or 180°, always stay straight up and down. Bring the left foot forward to the right as you turn on the right foot. Spin so that when you complete the step, you are now facing to your rear, but looking over your left shoulder. Without any pause, step out with the left foot into a back stance. That is how you should turn - always keep your support foot under your head when possible.

    To assume the swastika position the left arm is moved down into a downward block synchronized with the right arm being moved into an upper level inside block to the rear. There is a trick to doing this movement properly. Make sure that the right arm, while moving upward, takes a curved trajectory. Do not pull it away from your left side in a straight line. Instead, make the right fist travel in a diagonal arc away from your face so that your fist goes over your head and is never close to your head horizontally or vertically. Most people bend their right elbow too much and pull the fist under their chins.

11. **Hook Punch** - There are two different ways to perform this technique, and both are legitimate. You can hook punch from the upraised position of the right arm, or you can lower it into a chambered position and then punch across your body. Either way, lift the left foot up and push with the right so that you shift to the left about one foot. Assume a horse riding stance facing to your right, but keep your nose pointed to the left 90° over your left shoulder. Punch across your body so that your finishing position has your right elbow even with the side of your body, your fist slightly lower than your elbow, and your whole right arm posture makes a nice, neat rectangle with your torso when viewed from above. This punch is middle level.

12. **Repeat, Repeat** - Turn to the right 90° by pivoting on the heels. Don't shift the feet anywhere when you do this motion other than to turn the right foot. Shift your torso to the left, but not the feet, as you assume the back stance facing the other way. Perform the swastika block/posture and the hook punch as above. The timing for these four techniques is 1--2--3--4. Be careful not to perform them in the very common 1-2---3-4 fashion that most people do.

13. **Down Block** - Look left 90° and step in that direction with the left foot into a left front stance. Fold the arms at the midpoint of the step and down block as the foot settles. Pause.

14. **Palm Heel Strikes** - Step forward into a horse riding stance facing to the left so that your right side faces your imaginary opponent. Your head is still pointed in the same direction. Reach around widely from the chambered position your right hand was in instead of moving the hand directly from the hip. The idea is for this technique to take a very wide trajectory to give it a chance to wind up on its way to the target. Don't perform this as a block, but rather as if you are striking someone in the midsection with the bottom corner of the palm heel of the right hand. Focus the technique in time with the step. Step forward twice more, repeating this technique.

15. **More Swastikas** - Turn 270° into a back stance. Follow the directions above.

16. **Double Hand Block** - block to the left 45° angle with both arms in a double arm block posture. The left arm blocks like an inside block, and the right fist is pressed against the meaty portion of the forearm from the elbow toward the wrist, palm inward. As you block, bring the right foot up to the left and stand up with the feet together quickly. Do not chamber before throwing the block.

    Turn to the right 90° and step with the right foot into a back stance and repeat the sequence in the mirror image of itself.

17. **Crossed Arms** - Standing in place with the feet together, cross the arms at the wrists and bring them down with deceleration as you place the shoulders at 45° and move the fists to your sides. Your arms should point outward and down at that angle.

18. **X-Block** - Now raise your right knee strongly as you chamber both arms for punches quickly, and then lunge forward, stabbing the fists downward into X-blocks. Most people stab their arms down like this for all of their X-blocks, but usually the X-block does not require a chambering action. You should finish in the crossed leg stance with your knees bent. Don't bend forward - stay straight up and down.

19. **Sweep Up** - Now, stab the left foot backward behind you, as you did during the first technique of the kata, leaving your torso in place and your front knee bent so that you end up in a front stance. As you do that, quickly block to both sides as you did with the Crossed Arms technique listed above, except this time go as fast as you can. There should be no time between the X-block and this block. 1-2 is the timing.

20. **Double Inside Block** - Step forward into a front stance with the left foot forward and inside block with both arms. The left arm should fold inside the right. Be careful to focus in time with the placement of the foot.

21. **Shades of Tekki** - Step forward again and X-block to the high level with your hands in fists. The right fist should be inside the left fist. Immediately raise the left fist up so that the left arm takes the final position of an upper level rising block. The right arm. should strike around somewhat and forward as a vertical back fist strike. You should nearly straighten the elbow and strike to your own nose height.

    Reverse arms by punching forward with the left fist at lower chest level quickly while you move the right fist so that it points to the right ear. The right elbow should collapse as the right fist comes back from the vertical back fist position.

    Now bend the left elbow so that the left fist comes back as the right fist circles around performing an outside block. The left fist should be directly under the elbow of the right arm, and the left arm should be in the hook punch final position described above.

    The entire sequence from the X-block forward should be 1--2-3-4.
22. **Inside block punch** - Turn 270° into a left front stance and perform an inside block. Step forward and punch. Turn 180° and inside block. Step forward and punch. Perform this sequence with even rhythm 1--2--3--4.

23. **Down Block** - Look left 90° and step in that direction with the left foot into a left front stance. Fold the arms at the midpoint of the step and down block as the foot settles. Pause.

24. **Dropping Blocks** - Now, stepping three times as you did with the palm heel strikes, you will execute dropping blocks. Only this time, instead of stepping, you will also raise and drop your feet. Be careful how you do this. Do not raise the knee and then swing it around to drop. Rather, pivot the hips to front, raise the knee as if you were going to perform a front snap kick, and then continue the pivoting action as you lower the leg. That way, the knee will travel an under-curved course instead of an over-curved course, allowing you do bring the knee up strongly and snap it back down extremely quickly - which is your goal. Up and down quickly and strong.

    As you raise the knee, move the down block fist to cover the groin. Raise the right arm so that the elbow is nearly straight and the fist points upward, and then snap the arm back down immediately in synch with the knee's movements. Up with the knee, down with the knee. When you complete the block the palm should be inward on the right fist, and the arm should be in that same position it was in for the hook punch.

    Repeat this twice more, and be careful to move the blocking hand into position to protect the groin as you step.

25. **About Three Step Rhythm** - The palm heel strikes and the dropping blocks are both examples of repeating a single technique three times in a row. When you do there are two possible rhythms allowed: even rhythm and enhanced. The even rhythm stepping is 1--2--3. The enhanced rhythm is more like 1---2-3. Tournament performers tend toward the second rhythm as of this writing.

26. **Pull and Stab Slow** - Turn 270° into a horse riding stance, and reach across your body with your right hand as if grabbing opponent. Arc the hand up over the head and bring it down. Slowly and powerfully punch to the side with the left arm while drawing the right fist to a position directly in front of the right breast with the palm down.

27. **Pull and Stab Fast** -Pivot 180° so that you are looking over your right shoulder (don't move the feet), chambering the right fist at your hip as you reach over and across with the left arm. Perform this part of the motion very slowly, and then suddenly pull and punch with the right fist as you shift to the right six inches. Punch quickly and kiai.

28. **Finish** - Stand up by lifting and moving the right foot to a position next to the left foot. Return your hands to the fist in hand position from the beginning.

Jion



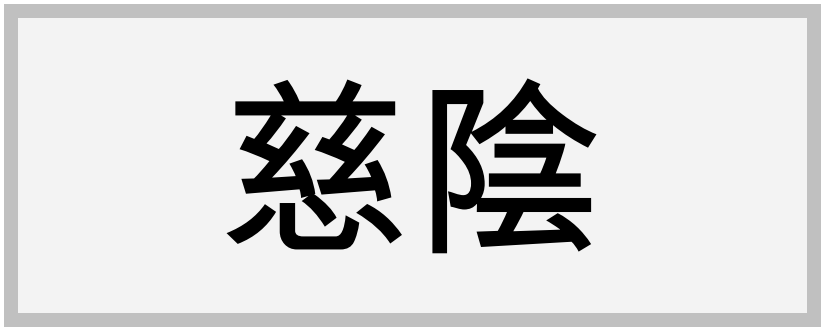
Jiin

The name Jiin literally can have two different meanings, since the name is often written using different characters by different Japanese instructors. One name means "Temple Grounds." The other possibility is the name meaning "Mercy and Kindness" if other characters are used. Using the character for temple as the first character separates the name from the name of Jion. However, the character for mercy is the same as in Jion. so that name is a more likely candidate for the real original spelling. Funakoshi tried to rename Jiin, along with many other kata, and failed. The name that he chose for Jiin, Shokyo or Pine Shadow, never stuck. Why the name was not adopted is not known.

寺院

Ji'in – "Temple Sanctuary"

Three Respect Kata
Jiin could technically be called a "Jion Sho" or Little Jion. It is half as long, and it has many of the same movements in it, although they are compressed to such an extent that the kata is actually somewhat more complex and difficult. For example, where Jion gives simple stepping techniques, Jiin contains many twists and turns that are difficult for intermediate students. Jiin contains several combinations which are more stationary, meaning that the performer stays in place, and this is usually a good indicator of the difficulty of a kata.



Ji'in – "Temple Shadow"

But, Jiin also has a unique relationship with Jutte. There are quite a few places in Jiin where techniques from Jutte are expanded upon and explained with more complex design and engineering. How do these three kata relate to each other? I recommend you read the articles on Jion and Jutte to learn more about Jiin.

Forgotten Kata
Jiin is not seen very often in tournaments, and for this reason practice of it is becoming more and more scarce. It is not very pretty, according to some, and its plodding and redundant enbusen does not help anyone to wish to learn it. Jiin is like many other kata in the Shotokan system, it is slowly being forgotten. The numbers of people who study karate continue to climb, and the percentage of them who will ever learn this kata are declining.



Shokyo – "Pine Shadow"

Jiin and Wankan were left out of Nakayama's Best Karate series. Whether this was intentional or was purely caused by Nakayama's sudden death in 1987 is unclear. However, the books that all Westerners generally view as being the definitive work on publishing visual images of kata do not contain Jiin and Wankan.

What's worse is that recently rumors have begun circulating that people choosing these kata for their specialty performance on examinations in some of the more dogmatic Japanese organizations are being told that this is not a Shotokan kata, and that it is not available for selection, even though Nakayama's work clearly shows that he intended that any kata from any system be considered available for selection for Tokui or Free Kata portions of an examination.

Ending Point Undefined

Jiin does not start and end on the same spot on the floor. No matter how the kata is toyed with, or what angles the stances are performed at, the kata will not come back to the same spot. There are two possible ways to solve the problem of Jiin not finishing where it began. One solution is to finish the kata by pulling in the left leg, a movement which is generally forbidden at the end of all Shotokan kata. Another solution is to simply accept that the kata, like many older kata, does not end on the same spot. Finishing the kata in a different spot may seem like a radical concept to the typical Shotokan enthusiast, but it is not a new concept.

Originally Heian 4 was intended to end behind the starting point, and Heian 5 in front of it so that the starting place was retained. Most of the kata which start and finish on the same spot were modified after World War II to do so. Therefore, many instructors in the West can only complete some kata on the starting point, while others continually finish 6 inches to three feet away from the starting position.

Having kata start and finish on the same point is a relatively new idea in karate. Many kata in other arts from Japan do not start and finish on the same spot. Likewise, karate kata used to start and finish at points decided upon by the creator without regard to some notion that the kata must end where it began. The idea was primarily motivated by the desire of the Japanese to quickly take karate into the sporting arena, where kata would be judged against each other. One of the factors of proper kata performance would be the little line on the floor from which the kata would launch and finish. Today, it is accepted as dogma that all kata start and finish on the same spot - all kata except for Enpi.

Of course, most people resolve this problem the way that Kanazawa Hirokazu does: They move their left leg back to the right at the end and correct the distance change.

Where are the missing steps?

Of course, the kata would probably end on the same spot it began on, or close to it, if the last four techniques had not been chopped off of the end. In the Shito version of Jiin, the kata contains a step to the left with an upper block and stepping punch, and then a 180° degree turn and another upper block and stepping punch.

Why were these techniques removed from the Shotokan version? Other changes include changing the vertical palm blocks to chops to the neck, which are much less realistic and difficult to pull off. The palm block is commonly used in free sparring by advanced players due to its efficiency and effectiveness, and here it is in a kata – but then removed for some reason. Another change was to remove the cat stances and a left turn on the third bottom fist strike.

Directions

1. **Hand Over Fist -** with both feet touching from ball to heel with the toes forward. The knees should be straight. The left hand should be over the right fist. The elbows should be at the sides of the body, and the tallest knuckle on the left hand should be directly in front of the chin. Do not bend the wrists and point the elbows out sideways. Instead, keep the elbows in pretty close to the sides of the body and the wrists straight.

2. **Bang!** - Jiin, like Jion, does not begin with a dramatic and demonstrative hand waving exercise or painfully slow execution of some incomparable posture. Jiin gets right down to business. Step backward with the left foot so that it becomes the rear foot of a right front stance. Do not move the torso to the rear as you do this. Simply bend the right knee, shoot the left foot backward, and lower the torso in place. Do this very suddenly and explosively. At the same time, unfold the hands from their positioning and down block with the right hand as you inside block with the left hand. This is the opposite of the position at the beginning of Jion.

   These arm actions are not preceded by folding or crossing of the arms. Simply burst them into place, and focus the arm actions with action of planting the left foot. Your body should suddenly be in motion, and then should come to a halt like a bird flying into a window.

3. **Swastika Postures** - Step out with the left foot to the left side so that it becomes the front foot in a back stance. Do these blocks simultaneously from a folded position. In the folded position, both hands are in sword hand postures and the right hand is palm up and reaching downward. The left hand is palm inward and beside the right ear. The folding action is a snapping technique. Downward block with the left arm and inside block to the upper level with the right arm.

   Shift your body weight over the other leg, pivot on the heels, and rotate to face the opposite direction in another back stance. Reverse the blocks after folding the hands as above.

4. **Upper Block Stepping Punch** So far in Jiin, you have described a T shape on the floor. Now you will draw angular lines up from the top of the T. Turn 120° (45° to the front wall), and left side upper block in front stance. Do this by reaching with the right open hand over your forehead, and then throwing an upper level rising block with the left hand as you rotate the hips to the side.

   Step forward middle level punch with the right hand.

Pivot on the left foot and move the right foot across 90° to the other side and upper block with the right arm in the mirror image of what you just did above. Step in and punch middle level.

5. **Down Block** - Turn to the left facing toward the front again and down block with the left arm in a front stance.

6. **Sword Hand Strikes** - Step forward into a side-facing horse riding stance with the right foot as the front foot. Raise the right hand as you begin the step as if you were going to throw an outside block, but keep the hand open. As the feet pass each other, right side outside sword hand strike to either the throat or the stomach. There seems to be a lot of discrepancy as to where this strike should actually land. You probably have some room to play here.

   Step forward again and repeat the strike. Step forward a third time and kiai.

7. **Wedge Block** - Pivot on the right foot counter clockwise drawing the left foot up to the right, turning, and then stepping out to the left flank 45° angle with the left foot so that you are in another front stance. As you move the foot forward and touch it to the floor, decelerate considerably so that your weight settles into the stance gently. Bring the fists up in front of your eyes about one foot away during the step while you are in a sort of cat stance during the midway point. The palm sides should be facing inward, and the arms should be crossed at the wrists. Turn the wrists as you pull your elbows down to your sides to perform a wedge block. The action of bringing the hands up should be extremely fast, in time with the first part of the stepping motion. Parting the arms and performing the block should start with a very small burst of speed, and then lose speed and gain tension as you move.

8. **Kicking and Punching** - Keeping your arms in the same position relative to your body, step forward and throw a right front snap kick to the middle level.

9. **Double Punch** - Throw two punches from your current position. Do not try to consciously wiggle your hips to power up the punches. Your hips should stay square to the front facing position. The first punch should be fast and snapped, the second punch is strong and thrusted. There is no time between the two punches.

10. **Shades of Heian 3** - Stay in position and fold the arms across so that the left fist is by the right ear, the right fist is on the left waist, and the elbows are very close together. Unfold them with a burst into a right inside block and a left down block.

    This is the posture from Jion. You will repeat it on the other side so that the down block goes into the empty space in front of the rear leg.

    The rhythm of the techniques from the wedge block to this set is 1------2--34-5.

11. **Repeat** - Perform the mirror image of that 5 technique sequence on the right side. Pivot on the left foot so that your right foot becomes the front foot of a new front stance 90° to the right. Wedge block as before, kick, throw the two punches, and then throw the cross block you did before, this time with the left arm in the inside block and the right arm in the down block.

12. **Stepping Bottom Fist Strikes** - From this position, you will step with the right foot and pivot on the left foot in a clockwise rotation so that you spin backwards most of the way around a circle. Finish in a horse riding stance and throw a bottom fist strike to your own shoulder height.

    Step and spin again, this time in a counter-clockwise rotation and finish in the same stance with the left leg forward and bottom fist strike with the left fist.

    Step without spinning this time so that the right leg becomes the front leg in yet a third side-facing horse riding stance. Strike with a bottom fist strike again (or is it a punch?).

13. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Step forward to a 45° angle to the left into a front stance. Some people like to perform this particular technique in an unmovable stance. The choice is yours. This kata is so different from one school to another, you probably have a lot of room to play, as I mentioned above. Decelerate and add tension to your left hand vertical sword hand block as you finish the step. Rotate the hips to the side if you are using a front stance.

14. **Combo Attack** - Now, rotate the hips strongly to the front so that you end up in a front-facing front stance and reverse punch. Snap this punch quickly and flow it into the next punch with the left hand. In place, without stepping forward, front snap kick to either the high or the low level with the right leg. Replace the leg on the floor back where it came from. Now punch again with the right hand.

    Now perform the cross block once again. Fold the arms and burst them apart so that the left arm is in an inside block and the right ends in a down block. You should still be in a left leg forward front stance at this point.

    The timing for this set, from the vertical sword hand block is 1----23-4--5-6.

15. **Cross Block** - Swing the left foot around counter-clockwise pivoting on the right foot until you are facing front again in a new horse riding stance. As you turn, fold the arms and perform another cross block in the opposite positions from the last technique: the right arm is doing an inside block while the left performs a down block

16. **Down Block** - Without moving any of your other body parts, flip the right hand down into a down block as well. Do this very quickly.

17. **Double Inside Blocks** - Slowly bring both hands up across the stomach and outward, decelerating and adding tension, as you perform an inside block with both hands simultaneously.

18. **Double Punch** - In the horse riding stance, without any stepping or shifting, punch directly from this position with the left hand to the high level. Flow into a middle level punch performed by the right hand. The first one is snapped, the second one is thrusted. Kiai on that second punch.

19. **Finish** - Stand back up into the hand over fist posture with the feet together. It depends on how you want to finish as to which foot you use.

Jiin



Jutte

The name Jutte is a combination of the character for the number ten and the character for hand, as in kara-TE. When using ten in this fashion, the Japanese sometimes pronounce the number ten with a ji sound instead of the ju sound. For example, if you do something ten times, the Japanese will say you have done it "jikkai." Also common after using the number ten to count things is a hard consonant - the tte is pronounced with a slight choke on the t's. You can call this kata Jutte or Jitte. It doesn't matter.

十手

Jitte – “Ten Hands” or “Ten Techniques”

Jutte/Jitte means Ten Hands. Ten Hands is said to imply that one must have the strength of ten men in Nakayama's *Best Karate Volume 7*, but there is no logical basis or source material for that loose interpretation.

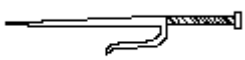
The two words Jitte and Jutte are interchangeable, but if the name of the kata is written with the character for technology instead of ten, then Jutte will mean "Technology Hands" or "Technique Hands." Jutte is a homonym that is comprised of the kanji for technique and the kanji for hand.

術手

Jutte – "Technique Hands"

The number ten may refer to the number of different techniques in the kata, or it may simply be another number name for a kata. Many Okinawan kata seem to be named with numbers. There are kata named 18, 36, 108, 54, 24, and so on. Most of the numbers are products of the numbers 2, 3, or 6. The significance of these numbers is mostly according to the number of stepping actions within each kata. Why multiples of 2, 3, and 6 are used to name kata is unknown. Note the number of non-repeating techniques below:

1. Palm Heel strike/block
2. Ridge hand strike/block
3. Upper level X block
4. Two downward blocks
5. Two inside/outside blocks (mountain posture)
6. Knife hand strike/block
7. Tiger mouth strike/trapping action (strikes+blocks)
8. Sweeping backward on one foot
9. Swastika posture
10. Upper level rising blocks



A Jitte

There is also some speculation that the kata name refers to the jitte weapon that Japanese police often carried 200 years ago. This weapon consisted of a pointed metal rod with a single appendage designed to catch a sword blade if used properly. The motions of the arms in Jutte are said to represent this weapon. In fact the name for this weapon is written as "Ten Hands." The arm postures also known as mountain postures look like this device. They also resemble the character for mountain.

Could it be that the name of the kata refers to the jitte weapon, and that it offers clues for fighting as if a human jitte: hooking and pulling away the enemy's weapon?

Jutte



Yama

Jutte/Jitte is a kata that could almost be performed using a staff or rod. However, some of the techniques have, of course, been stylized to the point that the motions necessary to continue using the staff throughout the kata are difficult to interpret at present. I have never understood why everyone insisted that this kata was actually a kata designed to be performed with a staff. Other than a couple of suspicious techniques where it seems you are obviously taking away or using a staff, the majority of the techniques are not indicative of staff fighting techniques.

The most impressive performances of Jutte are done by people who can move their arms in the mountain posture strongly and in synchronicity with their stepping. The secret to performing this well is hardly difficult, though. Begin in the posture, and turn the hips to the front to lift the knee forward as if you are about to perform a front kick. However, leave the arms and shoulders facing the side, and don't move them until you start to stomp downward with a strong twist. This involves twisting the spine, so be careful. That's all there is to it. Move the lower body but not the upper body until the last portion of the stomping action, and you'll look very strong when performing this kata.

For more information on Jutte, you should probably also read the articles on Jiin and Jion. I think that Jutte, Jion, and Jiin are different versions of the same kata. I have no idea what that may mean in terms of Jutte as a staff fighting kata, but it's obvious that all three are so similar that they have the same basis for their creation.

Directions for Jutte

1. **Fist in Hand** - Stand with both feet touching from ball to heel with the toes forward. The knees should be straight. The left hand should be over the right fist. The elbows should be at the sides of the body, and the tallest knuckle on the left hand should be directly in front of the chin. Do not bend the wrists and point the elbows out sideways. Instead, keep the elbows in pretty close to the sides of the body and the wrists straight.

2. **Try One of These** - Step back with the left foot slowly as you bend the right knee to assume a front stance. As you move the foot, begin moving the hands. The left hand should move forward in front of the right fist. The right fist goes

upward as the left open hand goes downward. Begin changing the right fist into a palm heel strike shape as if hooking the opponent with the back of the wrist. Pull the left hand back to the waist slowly as you hook the right hand downward until the palm heel is chest high. Begin this action quickly and then slow it down to a crawl as you come closer to completing it.

3. **Double Palm Heel Block** - Step with moderate quickness to the left 90° angle to assume a front stance with no width. The feet should be in-line with each other. Face your hips and shoulders to the 45° angle, and quickly pre-position your hands for the palm heel blocks. Then, slowly block downward with the right palm heel and upward with the left. When completed, the forearms should be at 90° angles to one another. The right arm should be straight and the left should be bent at 90°.

4. **Ridge Hand Strike** - Open the left hand so that the fingers aren't tucked in like they were. Place the left hand over the right elbow. Move the left foot about half-way to the right foot. Step out with the right foot into a horse riding stance facing the same direction you were facing when you started. Look to your right. Draw the left arm back strongly. Use your right hand to ridge hand strike with the palm upward to the right middle level. The ridge and should focus as the right foot becomes still.

5. **Palm Heel Strikes** - Place the left foot half way to the right foot again. Step to the left at a 90° angle with the right foot into a side facing horse riding stance. You should be looking over your right shoulder. Strike to the middle level from right to left with a palm heel strike. The left hand should be in a fist and drawn strongly at the left side. Swing the right arm around in a large circle to make the strike. Do not strike outward in a linear fashion from the hip.

   Step forward into a side facing horse riding stance again so that you are looking over your left shoulder and strike again the same way. Step again with the right foot and repeat. The timing of these three moves is either an even one of 1--2--3 or an uneven 1---2-3.

6. **Do the Shuffle** - Step with the right foot over the left toward your left. Look straight ahead. Even though you are stepping to your left, your nose now points in the same direction as your shoulders. With your right foot crossed over your left as you go in the other direction, stab upward with both fists and cross the arms at the wrists to make an upper level x-block. You should come to a full stop briefly at the x-block - do not perform this in a fluid, unstopping fashion with the next technique - but don't pause for any length of time, either.

   Now step out to the left with left foot into another horse riding stance. Block down and outward with both fists in side downward blocks directly from the original x-block posture.

   Now step to the left with the right foot, but do not cross the feet. Instead, just bring them together, and step shuffle out with the left foot to make another horse riding stance. As you step, fold the arms across the torso with the right arm

under the left. Block outward with two high level inside blocks. The result should be the mountain posture. The shoulders should be at 90° as should the elbows.

7. **Mountain Attack** - Turn the torso to square and raise the left knee. Keep the arms in place in physical space. You'll have to twist on your spine rather than turn the shoulders with the hips. The knee raise is a snapping action, so stomp it down strongly as soon as the knee reaches maximum lift. Continue turning the hips and then, at the last moment, turn the shoulders and the arm posture to perform what looks like a sort of outside block with the left arm.

   Step 2 more times stomping and turning as above.

8. **Stand Up** - Straighten the knees, bring the right foot in to the natural stance posture, and look over the right shoulder. Bring the arms down in the downward blocks on either side of the body, quickly at first and then very slowly.

9. **Knife Hand Block** - Shift the left foot to the left and out a little so that you rotate into a front stance facing the direction you were previously looking. Knife hand block with the right hand.

10. **Staff Block** - Lower the right hand and open it so that the palm is rounded and the thumb is sticking out. The right elbow should be relatively straight. Thrust the left hand out in the same shape to the level of the throat at the same time. The left elbow can be straight or bent at a 90° angle - it is not important. The reason for bending the elbow is to keep the hands lined up when viewed from the side - nothing more. Choose your favorite way to do this. This technique and the last should be a 1-2 count.

    There are two ways to perform the following set of techniques. First listed in the older way to do this, and then the newer way is listed. Pay close attention and compare this listing of techniques against a good picture catalog of the kata Jutte in ***Best Karate***, Sugiyama's ***25 Shotokan Karate Kata***, or Kanazawa's ***SKI All Kata of Shotokan*** books.

OLD WAY

11. **Grab the Staff** - Turn both hands over by rotating the wrists and forearms so that both thumb sides are down. Pull both hands back as if you are holding a staff - but do not shape the hands that way - leave them open with the thumbs out as before. Bring the right hand by the waist first, and then bring it up over and beside right shoulder. The left hand should follow until it is pointing back under the right hand, open, with the left arm across the lower abdomen at the right waist. As you do this, your left foot should come up to your right knee. The sole of your foot should be pointed toward the knee. Your torso should rotate 90° clockwise so that you are looking over your left shoulder. Move slowly and

continue to decelerate as you move.

MODERN WAY

Grab the Staff - Pull both hands back without turning the wrists. Instead, as they come back, move the left hand downward and the right hand upward. They should finish in the same position. The difference is that the older way to do this looks like you are grabbing something and torquing it down and back up again. The newer way to do this looks as though you grab hold and then pull it straight back, sliding your hands up and down to trade their positions with each other. Move the foot and torso and decelerate as above.

Either way you grab the staff is acceptable. See your organization or instructor for guidance, or choose which way to do it for yourself.

12. **Staff block** - Step forward with the left foot into a front stance quickly. Stab out with both hands open with the right hand on top this time and the left on bottom. Some people let their rear foot slide a little when step forward so that they cover more than a stance length of distance. I think the reason for this is because they are trying to get back to the starting point of the kata. Do this or not - your choice.

    Grab the staff and staff block again two more times. When you finish, your right foot will be forward and your hands will be out in a staff block position.

13. **Swastika Position** - Turn 270° by pulling the left foot in to the right, pivoting and then stepping out with the left foot to the left side so that it becomes the front foot in a back stance. Do these blocks simultaneously from a folded position. In the folded position, both hands are in sword hand postures and the right hand is palm up and reaching downward. The left hand is palm inward and beside the right ear. The folding action is a snapping technique. Downward block with the left arm and inside block to the upper level with the right arm.

    Shift your body weight over the other leg, pivot on the heels, and rotate to face the opposite direction in another back stance. Reverse the blocks after folding the hands as above.

14. **Upper blocks** - Step to the left 90° angle with the left foot and assume a front stance. As you move, cover for the upper level rising block by raising the open right hand. Block as the foot lands. Step forward and block again. Turn 180° by pivoting on the right foot and moving the left foot as you turn counter clockwise. Upper level rising block as you pivot. Step forward and upper level rising block again and kiai.

    The timing for these four stepping/turning blocks should be 1--23--4.

15. **Finish** -
    Pivot counter clockwise as you pull the left foot in toward the right. Finish when you have pivoted 180°. As you turn, pull the foot to the right and assume the closed-leg-stance. Bring the left hand back over the right fist as in the beginning.

Jutte



Enpi

Another of the Big Four kata, Enpi is especially difficult for some karateka who are not very light on their feet. Enpi contains the first truly difficult jumping technique that many karate players ever face. Enpi is for this reason considered a core kata, and it is required in advanced dan exams as well as the second round of eliminations in many tournaments.

燕飛

Enpi – "Swallow Flight"

The name Enpi is composed of the characters for swallow (the bird) and fly. Therefore the name of the kata is often translated as "Flying Swallow", "Flight of the Swallow", or "Swallow Flight." All of these names could be considered accurate translations of the Japanese characters. The name can be written as Enpi or Empi - it really does not matter. The pronunciation of the np sound and the mp sound in English and Japanese is the same, and standard Romanizations of Japanese allow for either spelling.

The original name of this kata is Wanshu - perhaps created by or in reference to Suppashi Wanshu, a famous karate instructor of Okinawa's past. Enpi is perhaps a Funakoshi created name for this kata, and it is apparently a name that actually stuck, unlike most of his other attempts at renaming kata: Sochin -> Hakko, Wankan -> Shiofu, and Gojushiho -> Hotaku were all name changes that his students declined to adopt.

Enpi has an unusual enbusen which travels forward and to the left. The kata can be performed from the back right corner of a room large enough to hold for steps in either direction.

Enpi contains a jumping technique during which a sword hand block is executed. If the performer cannot lift his feet to reach about 1/2 of his personal body height during the jump, then it will generally fail to impress in competition. Enpi is one of those kata which lends itself to athletic and young people rather than those of us who begin training later in life.

Directions

1. **Chinese for "How ya doin?"** - The beginning posture of this kata is just like that for Bassai Dai, Jion, Jutte, and Jiin. However, the hands are not in front of the chest or the hips. Instead, the hands are placed at the left waist, with the right hand in a vertical fist and the left hand open as in a sword hand block. The fingers of the left hand point forward and are straight, not wrapped around the fist. The hands are brought to that position calmly and quietly, without any overt fanfare or dramatic motions.

2. **Over The Top** - Look to the right 45° angle and step out with the left foot to the left about shoulder width foot in distance. Bend the right knee so that your hips face to the left for the most part and you are kneeling with the right knee on the ground. The angles here are very important. Make sure that your right knee is at a 90° angle. Your left knee should also be at a perfect 90° angle. Your legs, when viewed from the front, should shape a perfect box. From their opening posture, move the hands quickly so that the right hand blocks to the right 45° angle. The left hand should be palm up in a fist and should slide to a spot just under the navel. The block and the kneeling motion should be carefully timed so that they happen together.

3. **Tea Time** - Stand back up quickly and assume the natural posture with the feet and legs. The hands should draw back to the left waist again in a cup and saucer position with the left arm fully drawn back and the right arm across the stomach. The right vertical fist should sit on top of the left fist. Perform this motion strongly and quickly.

4. **Down Block** - Look to the right 90° angle this time and block with the right hand in a downward block as you step outward. Step into an in-line front stance with the right leg becoming the front leg of the stance. Do not move the left arm

as you step outward into the front stance. Instead, only move the right arm as needed directly from the hip.

5. **Hook Punch** - Now hook punch with the left arm. Shift your weight back in between your feet and change stances so that you are in a horse riding stance facing to the front again. Do not rise up as you make this change. Punch with the left hand so that the focus action and the shift are coordinated.

   The timing of these first four techniques is 1---2--3-4. The amount of pause between each technique decreases with each technique performed in the four technique sequence.

6. **Down Block** - Now step forward with the left foot, leaving the right foot where it is, into a front stance. As you step, fold the arms for a downward block. As the step connects, focus the block and finish turning the hips to the side. Even though the hips are to the side, be sure that the front knee does not lean inward and that the face is pointed exactly forward. Don't let your head turn with your shoulders.

7. **Scoop Punch** - The scooping punch is an easy technique to perform. Most people wish that they were performing a straight on reverse punch, since when correctly performed, this technique seems weak and unlikely.

   To punch, turn the hips as you would for any reverse punch. As you puch forward, turn the fist over sooner than you would for your normal reverse punch. Normally, the fist turns over at the very, very end of the punch from palm up to palm down - in the last inch of motion. During this punch, turn the fist over fully at the 1/3 mark. Also, be sure that you are punching at the middle level almost to full extension, and then begin raising the fist upward with a straight elbow. Think of how you could punch so that the back of your hand would smack under someone's chin.

   Here is where things go a little awry as far as Enpi compatibility is concerned. This kata has been toyed with a little bit since the big standaradization meeting that Nakayama wrote about. Supposedly, in 1948, everyone got together and decided what the Shotokan kata were going to be and how they were going to be performed so that in competition everyone would perform their kata the same way. However, since that time, Enpi has been through a couple of revisions. I'll label one of them Old Way and the other New Way. You can either choose for yourself which to perform or let your instructor pick for you.

OLD WAY

8. **Tiger Mouth** - Open the fist with the thumb pointing outward. Bend the wrist and point the fingers downward, then begin rotating the hand around until the fingers point straight up and the palm is up. Now, start rotating the wrist in the other direction so that the palm faces forward and slowly come to a stop. This action should be very similar to the one in Hangetsu. The elbow should stay straight throughout, and the next technique follows on it very quickly.

NEW WAY

9. **Open Palm** - Open the hand so that the palm points downward at moderate, but not decelerating, speed. The thumb should be against the side of the hand as in a sword hand block.

10. **Raise Knee** - Step forward by raising the knee as if striking to the middle level with it as you push the hips forward with your supporting foot. The knee raising action is a snapping one, so don't try to hold the posture for any length of time. Just execute the knee strike and keep going.

11. **Punch Down** - Lunge forward off of the momentum of the raising of the knee, and then step down with the right foot. Immediately follow with the left foot, and bring it up to the right in a crossed-feet posture with the legs bent. Be careful not to bend forward as you do this. Bend the knees as much as you can, crossing the feet at the ankles. Fold the arms as if you are about to do a down block (you are), and keep the hips straight forward. When folding, like any other folding action before a down block, keep in mind the punching action of the hand reaching forward and the blocking action of the hand going over the shoulder. You should punch with the left fist and block with the right. Thrust this action, don't snap it.

12. **Backward Down Block** - Step to the rear with the left foot so that the left foot becomes the front leg of a very long and deep front stance. The right leg should straighten strongly as your weight moves to the rear. Keep your nose pointed forward, though. Don't turn. Down block with the right hand and draw the left hand strongly. The right hand should be over the right knee - the rear leg. The stance ends up a strange sort of back stance that is really a front stance going the other way.

    Unlike most other techniques, in this one, you lean toward the front leg so that your back is parallel to the rear leg.

13. **Down Block** - Turn 180° (your head) and pull the front foot back a little to shallow up the stance to normal depth. Down block with the left arm strongly - folding the arms in a snapping motion and then blocking so that the focus of the block and the settling of the left foot are simultaneous.

    The count for these last two actions is a 1-2 count. The first down block is sort of a quick thrust - almost a snap - that bleeds into the next technique.

    Main Sequence: The entire sequence of techniques including the down block, scoop punch, opening hand, knee lift, punch down, reverse direction down block, and the following turn down block is the main sequence of the kata. From this point forward, the entire set will be referred to as the Main Sequence.

14. **Rinse and Repeat** - repeat the entire main sequence from the scooping punch to the turning down block.

15. **Build an Arc** - From the down block position, lift both the front leg of the front stance and the left hand. Arc both up high and over to the left so that the foot

lands in a position making it the left leg of a horse riding stance (back and to the side). The hand should be in a sword hand block posture, and it should be palm inwards to the face with the elbow at a 90° angle. Make the hand motion by first opening the hand and then drawing a quarter circle with the fingertips until it reaches its final position.

16. **Elbow Smash** - Once you have fully decelerated the last technique, explosively turn the hips to the left and look forward over the right shoulder. During the turn, the nose remains pointing at the same spot. Lower the left palm and raise the right arm as if making an outside block inward. Smash the side of the elbow, high on the forearm, into the palm of the left hand. Raise the right foot and quickly tuck it behind the left knee. Kiai on this motion.

17. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Step back down into a horse riding stance with the right foot. Folding the left arm under the right, perform a slow and strong vertical sword hand block to the middle level. Make sure that the elbow is straight and not bent. Bend the arm only at the wrist.

18. **Two Punches** - In the same position, throw two punches. The first punch should snap, the second punch should thrust. The first punch is fast, the second punch is strong. Right side punch then left.

19. **Down Block** - Turn to the left 90° and, leaving the right foot where it is, move the left foot so that it becomes the front foot in a front stance. Open the width of the stance. As you step, fold the arms for a downward block. As the step connects, focus the block and finish turning the hips to the side. Even though the hips are to the side, be sure that the front knee does not lean inward and that the face is pointed exactly forward. Don't let your head turn with your shoulders.

20. **Scoop Punch** - To punch, turn the hips as you would for any reverse punch. As you punch forward, turn the fist over sooner than you would for your normal reverse punch. Normally, the fist turns over at the very, very end of the punch from palm up to palm down - in the last inch of motion. During this punch, turn the fist over fully at the 1/3 mark. Also, be sure that you punch at the middle level almost to full extension, and then begin raising the fist upward with a straight elbow. Think of how you could punch so that the back of your hand would smack under someone's chin.

21. **Sword hand block** - Step forward with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot of a new back stance. Sword hand block with the right hand.

22. **Sword Hand Block** - Switch feet and sword hand block with the left hand. Retract the front foot by pulling it back with a lift rather than by pushing with the front foot to step backward. Bring the right foot back to the left and immediately step forward with the left so that it becomes the front foot of a new back stance.

23. **Straight Punch** - Reverse punch across your body by twisting the waist - not the hips - as much as possible in your back stance. Punch with the right arm as soon as the sword hand block connects.

24. **Sword hand block** - Step forward with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot of a new back stance. Sword hand block with the right hand.

25. **Main Sequence** - Turn 90° and perform the down block that begins the Main sequence. Continue through the scoop punch, opening of the hand, knee lift, downward punch, extra deep reverse side down block, and the 180° turn down block.

26. **Palm Heel Blocks Galore** - If you ever really wanted to do lots of palm heel blocks slowly, now is your opportunity. Turn the hips fully front facing, but look to the right 45° angle. Slowly bring the right palm heel block upward until the elbow is at 90° and the shoulder is at 45°. The block should finish just below shoulder height.

    Now move the right foot toward the left and reset the hands so that the right is low and the left is high. Do this explosively, and then step to the right 90° angle with the right foot so that it becomes the front foot of a new front stance. Block with strong deceleration with both both palm heels. The right should go up again, and the left should go down until the left elbow is straight.

    Step forward with the left foot and repeat the mirror of the above action. Remember to step and begin the hand motions explosively, but then decelerate strongly as you complete the motions.

    Step forward and third time and repeat the above again.

27. **Forklift** - shift forward in a back stance with the right foot foward. Down block with the right arm, but draw the left arm only to in front of the lower abdomen. Now shift another six inches forward as you shift your body weight into an unmovable stance with the right leg still forward. Bring the left hand up as if for an upper block, but with the hand open and palm upward. Extend the left thumb away from the hand. The right hand should be palm upward and in the lower block position.

28. **Throw** - Anytime you jump in a kata, think of that as what your opponent should do - not yourself. You pick him up and throw him. To symbolize this, turn 180° in place and leap off of the left leg as if you are doing a basketball layup. Continue turning another 180° so that you jump behind your previous position by exactly one stance length. Your front foot should land where your rear foot was before. As you are jumping, draw your feet under your buttocks and your knees into your chest to get them as far away from the floor as possible. Fold your arms for the sword hand block as you leap. As you land, throw the block. It should focus in time with the landing. Both feet should land at the same time. There should be no shuffling of the feet. They should plant on the first drop and be still.

29. **Sword hand block** - Step backward one step and throw another sword hand block.

30. **Finish** - Step back with the front foot into the fist in hand position that you began in.



Hangetsu

Han means half. Getsu means moon or month. When not in combination with other characters the second character is also pronounced tsuki (moon) or gatsu (month). Hangetsu means "Half Moon" or "Half Month." The stance that is utilized within it is the Half Moon Stance, named after the kata: Hangetsu-dachi. The stance cannot be translated as "hour glass stance."

半月

Hangetsu – "Half Moon" or "Half Month"

Hangetsu could be taken not as a half-moon, but rather as a half month, which is an equally legitimate interpretation of the name Hangetsu. The entire kata could be taken from some orphaned Chinese folk dance in which the performer is explaining the importance of the tides, as they cycle on 13 day intervals as the moon revolves around the Earth. Rather than originating with karate techniques, the movements of this kata may originate with descriptive Asian dance movements which show when you should do what based on the phases of the moon or rising and falling of the tides.

Most people seem to prefer to think of the name Half-Moon as being related to the semicircular stepping actions in the kata. Hangetsu was originally called Seisan, which means 13, on Okinawa, and it was part of the Shuri City method of performing karate.

The source of the name Hangetsu is unknown, but it is probably Funakoshi's work. His book ***Ryukyu Kenpo Karate*** lists this kata under the name Seisan. The name Seisan could be a reference to the 13 day cycle of the moon's phases, and knowing this, Funakoshi could have named the kata "half month/moon."

A Little Different From Other Kata

Hangetsu contains many slow, tensed motions requiring breathing exercise of the performer. The idea is to create isometric contractions in the muscles during the movements. This was thought to harden the body against a blow, as well as strengthen any techniques that might be thrown. The idea is also to bring the muscles to contraction so that relaxation which naturally follows is more dramatic. It teaches the value of gradual tension and relaxation and the breathing patterns that accompany them. It also gives you a valuable tool for reducing shoulder tension. When you maximize muscle tension and then relax, your body usually ends up more relaxed than before you tensed.

Many different schools of karate practice kata like Hangetsu with deep, noisy breathing which is popularly known as ibuki. Ibuki is not practiced in Shotokan, and even though the breathing should be deep during the kata, there should not be any discernible noise. Any noise the practitioner makes is caused in the throat, not in the abdomen where tension is supposed to lie. Pressing the breath down in the throat is not a safe practice - especially for older folks. Properly practiced, there will be no Count Dracula noise coming from the performer during Hangetsu's slow actions.

The Hangetsu stance is noted by many to cause knee pain. The pain is probably related to the fact that so many people have learned a poor practice where stances are performed with intentional effort given toward pulling the legs toward one another.

The Hangetsu stance, along with the cat leg stance and the Sanchin stance, are taught as inside tension stances by many instructors. Students end up learning that they should pull their knees inward toward one another while they are in such a stance, as if they are trying to make themselves into human suction cups that will grip the floor. The truth is that although the knees are inward on this stance, one should not pull the knees inward toward one another. Doing so will eliminate the support of the rear foot for any forward pushing technique such as a punch. The feet should simply rest on the floor, or, if you wish to experiment with more complicated body dynamics, you can try pushing the front foot forward and the rear foot backward. Pushing front and back, as in a front stance, will pre-load the rear leg to push forward in support of a technique. Unload the front leg and boing! the energy of the stance is unleashed in a forward direction. Pulling the knees inward can have no possible function.

The Source

The origins of the kata are in a kata called Seisan or Seishan. Both pronunciations are legitimate on Okinawa - and depending upon the speaker, the name of the kata is spelled differently. Seisan literally means "13" and is pronounced Jusan on the mainland of Japan. Okinawa's dialect frequently results in strange pronunciation differences for the same characters.

Start at the yoi posture, and begin counting non-repeating instances of different techniques. Remember, if a technique occurs once, no matter how or where, that is the only time you count it.

1. Inside block
2. Punch
3. Pull back
4. Two-handed one knuckle strike
5. inside ridge hand blocks
6. knife hand blocks downward
7. Wrist lock
8. Overhead vertical back fist with wide, high stepping action
9. Front snap kick
10. Downward block
11. Upper rising block
12. Crescent kick
13. Palm heel block

There you have your thirteen techniques! Just like the kata Jutte, Hangetsu is probably named for the number of differentiated techniques that you will learn by performing it regularly. That explains the number 13 for the name of the original kata Seisan.

Southern Chinese Seisan

Kata containing heavy, tense, and slow motions are very popular in Goju-Ryu and the many descendants of Naha City Tode on Okinawa. However, this particular kata does not come from Naha. The Naha-te Seisan is more complicated and somewhat more impressive as a kata than Hangetsu, in my opinion. This Seisan contains many techniques, such as a Bassai Dai-like side thrust kick that our Hangetsu lacks, although there is a place for it. The kick makes a turning action in Hangetsu make more sense perhaps.

The two kata are obviously rooted in the same exercise, but are different enough that it is apparent that the Goju (Naha-te) version has undergone dramatic enhancement. The Naha-te kata is most impressive. I believe that the Naha version of Seisan that is taught in Goju-Ryu and Shito-Ryu is a more recent development than the Seisan (Hangetsu) kata of Shotokan and was imported from China perhaps after the original Seisan had undergone some revisions in China.

Southern Chinese martial artists call this kata Four Gate Hands. Apparently Hangetsu originally comes from Southern China, and is almost perfectly preserved in certain schools such as Southern Praying Mantis. When seeing the Four Gate Hands exercise performed, any experienced Shotokaner immediately knows that he is seeing Hangetsu. In the Chinese form, the turn at the top is one move earlier - between the mountain and the tree, rather than after the tree - which has huge implications for the applications.

術手

Jutte – "Technique Hands"

An interesting point is that the Wado-Ryu version of Seisan is taken from the precursor of Shotokan that Funakoshi was teaching. Because the Wado style was spawned from Shotokan Karate in the 1930's, that version would give an indication of what Funakoshi was initially teaching or at least its first metamorphosis from what was going on in Okinawa. Since it is so strikingly similar to the version and other Shorin-Ryu Seisan practiced on Okinawa, it is reasonable to assume that the extensive mucking about that occurred with so very many kata did not happen with this one for whatever reason.

As such, the kata remains a veritable time capsule, containing Southern Chinese technical theories. The kata is different enough from the Southern Chinese exercise to no longer pass along these technical methods with any clarity without viewing the original, which is a shame.

Odds and Ends
Hangetsu also contains the "Mountain Posture" seen in Bassai-Dai, Jutte, and some other kata. This posture is named after a mountain not because you look like a mountain, but rather because the posture resembles the kanji for Mountain in Chinese and Japanese.

This kata is odd among the Shotokan Karate kata. It is extremely unpopular as a favorite kata, and is rarely seen in competitions. Unlike Unsu, it has little in it that offers sex appeal to the kata competitor. Very few students jump up and down begging for lessons in Hangetsu.

Besides the lack of acrobatic techniques, this kata, I think, falls completely outside of the Shotokan Karate Kata database. There are no ties from any of the techniques to anything else in the database. Basically, the kata sits all by itself, so distant from everything else that the Shotokan student learns that he is unable to interpret it properly and find use for it in his mental imagery of what karate training is all about. There are some "dotted line" ties that could be drawn from some of the techniques, such as the inside block and two punches, but for the most part, the stances and the overall character of the kata are unique among our database.

This kata makes much more sense in a system that teaches Sanchin as its first kata. From that perspective, the kata fits naturally. So, while it is technically from Shorin-Ryu, the kata simply makes more sense to a Goju Practitioner.

In an attempt to clear up issues like this without doing any real attempt at research, Funakoshi, in my opinion, grouped the kata into what he called the Shorei and Shorin

styles in his book ***Ryukyu Karate Kenpo***. These arbitrary groups that he invented make no sense, though, since all of the Shotokan kata are Shorin-Ryu kata, and no Shotokan kata come from the so-called Shorei-Ryu: Goju-Ryu or Naha-Te. In fact, no one but Funakoshi even seems to know what a Shorei-Ryu would be, since these systems do not refer to themselves using the name "Shorei." The Shorei/Shorin groupings Funakoshi invented are easily swept aside by anyone doing any logical reasoning while studying the bibliographical and historical roots of the kata.

Clearly all of the Shotokan Karate kata come from Shorin-Ryu, and none come from any other style, most especially this kata, Hangetsu.

Directions for Hangetsu

1. **Natural Position** - Begin and end this kata by assuming the natural position.

2. **Half Moon Block and Punch** - The half moon stance is used throughout this kata. To create the stance, place the feet in the position for a front stance. Make the stance 2 inches wider and 6 inches shorter. The knees collapse inwards rather than pushing outwards as in a front stance. When you step in half-moon stances, you should move the feet in a semi-circular fashion as viewed from above. The rear foot should be pulled inward toward the other foot. You then step forward and out completing the semi-circle.

   The kata begins with such a semi-circle step with the left foot. Bring the left foot inward, then step outward and forward into a half moon stance quietly and with moderate slowness. Don't move in slow motion, but make no attempt to be particularly fast. As the feet draw in toward each other, the right arm should reach forward with a fist and the left should reach under the right - completing a fold for a left inside block. The speed with which you should perform this portion of the technique is in dispute. Some people move the arm slowly and carefully from the beginning, while others prefer to snap the fold together and then execute the block itself slowly.

   Now step forward and execute the inside block slowly as you step. Don't just move slowly, though, but move with great tension in both arms, chest, and back. You will finish the step before you finish the block, unlike when you are moving quickly, so don't panic if you find yourself finished with the stepping portion and only 3/4 through the block.

   Once you have finished the block, begin a full tension motion of a reverse punch. Be careful not to allow any of these tensions from creating feedback distortion in your techniques. You want to be contracted strongly, but not in a pulsating fashion. If you alternate the tensions in your muscles in pulses, your arm will shake.

3. **Breathing** - Breathing is in dispute. Some prefer to inhale throughout the block and then exhale on the punch. Others prefer to inhale on the fold before the block, exhale while blocking, inhale in between techniques, and then exhale on the punch. Everyone agrees that you exhale on the punching action, but that's where the agreement ends. Don't obsess over which way is best. Experiment for

yourself, and then stick to a method. If you are any good at breathing, no one will ever know which method you chose because no one will be able to tell what your breath is doing.

That's right - you should not make any hissing or hacking noises during your slow, tense techniques. Goju schools emphasize ibuki breathing in which you close part of the throat in order to create tension in the abdomen and diaphragm. Shotokan has no such technique. So, when you breath, it should be silent, controlled by the diaphragm directly, and should not involve making a strange slurping noise in your throat.

4. **Rinse, then Repeat** - Perform the block-punch combination stepping forward twice more.

5. **Mr. Pointy Knuckles** - Reach forward with the left fist even with the right fist slowly and with tension. Do not step or move the legs. Pull both fists back slowly changing the shape of the fists from the normal fist to one-knuckle fists that have the index finger knuckle pointing forward. Pull both fists back to positions in front of the breasts. Then, still using slow tense motions, punch forward with both one knuckle fists slowly and strongly. From this position, you will not be able to adhere to the rule of keeping the elbows in close. So, don't worry about your elbows sticking out when you throw this double punch.

6. **Mountains of Fun** - Assume the Mountain Posture. As in Jutte and Bassai Dai, Hangetsu contains the emblem of the kanji for mountain, and this is where it is. From their outstretched postures, raise both open hands upward and outward, making an X of your forearms crossed at the midpoint between hand and elbow. The right hand is forward of the left hand, and both are open with flat palms. Continue to expand the chest and contract the back until the shoulders and elbows reach 90°. Your elbows should be exactly at shoulder height, causing the arms to shape a big rectangle with right angles all around. Perform this action in a relaxed fashion at first, and then increase the tension as the arms cross. By the end of the motion, you should be pretty tense.

7. **Forest for the Trees** - Now shape yourself in the character for Tree. Bring both arms in front of you in an X again in a relaxed fashion, and then continue downward until they are at your sides - pointing outward at 45° with the palms down. This time, when you bring the arms in and cross them on the way down, the right arm is inside of the left arm.

8. **Turn and Fire!** - Pivot on the left foot counter clockwise until you are facing 180° in the other direction. Assume a half moon stance again by strongly planting the right foot into the floor with a moderate stomp. As you pivot, fold the arms for a down block, but with the hands open in sword hands. As you turn, strongly block so that the left arm goes down into a downward block and the right arm makes an inside block. Both hands are open. Focus the actions of the arms in synch with the stomp of the right foot.

9. **Tiger Mouth** - Turn the right wrist counter clockwise until the right palm faces forward. At the same time that you are rotating the wrist, open the thumb away

from the palm of the right hand, and curve the right hand fingers just a little. The entire action should require about 1.25 seconds, so don't move too fast, but also don't make a huge dramatic production out of it by going too slow. Drop the elbow and the hand just a little after you are done rotating at the wrist.

10. **Blocking Tigers** - Step forward very quickly and perform the same down/inside double block above again in mirror image. Then make the tiger mouth motion with the right hand. Step again, and repeat the whole sequence.

11. **Shades of Unsu** - Look to the right quickly. Fold the left arm over the right with the hands in fists. Step to the left with the right foot into a half moon stance. The left foot should not move very much during this action - if at all. Inside block in synch with the stepping down action of the right foot. Throw two punches after the block - the first punch should be fast and relaxed, the second punched should be strongly thrust.

    Turn 180°, step with the left foot in that direction so that it becomes the front foot of a half moon stance. Inside block and double punch as in the previous technique.

    Turn 90°, step with the right foot in that direction so that it becomes the front foot of a half moon stance. Inside block and double punch as in the previous technique.

12. **Half Moon Kick** - Turn your head 180° to the rear. Fold your arms right over left and begin drawing the rear (left) foot upward to the chest. As you draw the knee up, turn the hips to the left in a counter-clockwise direction and bring the left fist up past the right ear and over the head slowly. Extend your knee and reach out with the foot so that it describes a large arc in the air from the ground across your chest and then back onto the floor behind you to become the front foot of a left side back stance. The left arm should finish in an inside block posture, but should be drawn down in to that position as if throwing a vertical back fist strike downward from above.

13. **A Flurry of Techniques** - Step across the left foot with the right so that the feet barely touch. Leave the right fist at the waist in the drawn position as you bring the right fist up next to the right ear in a sort of guard position. Front snap kick to the middle level with the left foot, stepping down into a left side half moon stance. As the foot lands, bring the left arm down in a downward block without a drawing action. As soon as the block focuses, throw a reverse punch. Immediately follow that with an upper rising block.

14. **Repeat as Necessary** - Turn 180° and repeat the same sequence on the opposite limbs from the big, arcing leg lift to the upper rising block.

15. **Finish** - Turn 180° again, and perform the inside block looking vertical back fist coupled with the arcing leg lift until you are in a left side back stance. With the right foot crescent kick the palm of the left hand. Do not turn or step forward, however. Immediately step back so that the right foot goes back where it came from, and reshape the stance into a half moon stance. As the foot stomps into the

floor, perform a reverse punch with the right fist as if to a target on the ground. Do not bend forward. Kiai on this technique. Now, shift the right foot back, and then pull the left foot back with it gently into a cat leg stance with the left foot as the front foot. As you perform this action, put the palm heels of both hands together and press downward with increasing tension.

The fingers of the hands should be folded up so that the fingernails are at the very top of the palms. The thumbs should be tucked in as well. Press downward until the hands point sideways away from each other. Once you have held this posture for about two seconds, stand back up into the natural body position by pulling your left foot back even with the right while you straighten your knees.

Hangetsu



Gankaku

This kata's name is composed of two kanji. The first is rock, and the second is crane (a stork). The common interpretation is a crane standing upon a rock, but it could also be taken to simply imply a species of crane or stork.

This kata is supposed to be related to the kata Chinto practiced in many systems of Shorin-Ryu on Okinawa. There are two different Chinto that we can identify in Okinawan karate systems. One Chinto kata is the Shotokan Gankaku kata, and the other is reminiscent of Gankaku, but not really. The two kata are obviously different versions of one another. Kanazawa Hirokazu has learned and begun teaching the other version of Chinto under the name Gankaku-Sho. You can see the other Chinto in Nagamine Shoshin's book about Shorin-Ryu Karate "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-do."

岩鶴

Gankaku – "Rock Crane"

Gankaku is an interesting kata composed of techniques unique to it. In Shotokan Karate, there are not many kata in which you are expected to balance upon one leg, but Gankaku requires this action throughout. Another interesting feature is the use of side snap kicks after the one legged posture. The opening technique of Gankaku implies blocking with

both hands, either grabbing or merely pressing the incoming technique away. The double level kick of Kanku-Dai is in Gankaku, but in mirror image. The right leg is the first off of the floor rather than the left. Practice of Gankaku could perhaps be viewed a balancing action for this technique in Kanku Dai, but its importance is much more than that.

The author of this kata is unknown. The date of origin of the kata is unknown. However, the original name of the kata was "Chinto" which means Battle East. Funakoshi successfully changed the name to Gankaku not only to present a Japanese language name that would appeal to his market, but also to remove the connotations of war and battle that the name Chinto carries.

Gankaku is not unique among karate kata for imitating the one legged stance of a water fowl to produce a combat motion. Another kata unpracticed in Shotokan but very popular among Shito-Ryu and other Japanese styles is Rohai. Rohai has four different versions, one from Matsumura, the other three from Itosu, all four of which are reasonably popular in other styles of karate. Rohai means "Symbol of the Heron", and it contains one legged postures as well. One of the Itosu versions is the one that Meikyo is thought to come from. The Matsumura version is the most commonly seen among Shito-Ryu groups.

I used to hold a romantic image in my mind of elegant storks standing on one leg with a Japanese garden for a backdrop. This imagery was ruined for me by life in Japan, however, where the most common place to find a crane or heron standing on one leg is in a drainage ditch surrounded by litter.

Directions

1. **Natural Stance** - Gankaku owns no opening flare of its own. There is no strange salute, no looking through triangles formed by your hands, and no spreading of the arms outward in some grandiose gesture. Just stand in the natural position with the hands at the sides in relaxed fists.

2. **Pressing Side Block** - Place both hands together with the backs pressed together. The hands should be open in the sword hand position. Do not cross them only at the wrist as if to perform an x-block. Instead, touch the hands together from the knuckles to the wrists. Bring them upward and outward around the right shoulder. As you do this, step back with the right foot so that it becomes the rear foot in a new back stance.

   As you step back, do not lean forward or backward. Move the torso directly above the hips and keep the pelvis over the rear foot as much as possible. For some people, the back stance looks more like a horse riding stance gone insane, but that's OK. Do what you can with what you were born with.

   Bring the hands across the face from the right and block to the left as if a punch to the chin is being redirected behind the head. By now, you are fully in your back stance.

3. **Press Again** - Next you will take advantage of a movement in Heian 5. Without changing the stance or the posture, stand in place and move the hands to the right side of the torso below the shoulder. To do this, unhook your hands during the motion so that they are no longer pressed together by the back of the hands. Press the palm heels together, and as you lower the hands to your right, your hands will spin. Finally, the right hand fingertips will point forward, and the left hand fingertips will point to the right.

4. **Two Punches** - Punch with the left hand in place without drawing the left hand. It will feel as though you are using a bottom fist strike because of the trajectory. After focusing the left punch, punch with the right hand. Neither punch takes advantage of hip rotation. Rather, you should twist at the waist to bring the right shoulder around to help with the punch.

   The timing for these two techniques is 1-2-3-4. Don't pair up the punches. They do not flow into each other.

5. **Spinning Down Block** - This technique is unique to Gankaku. Lift the right foot as you begin spinning on the left foot in a counter-clockwise direction. Do not fold the arms for a down block. Rather, just move the right arm up and over from it's position punching until you stop spinning.

   You should set the foot down when you are back where you started. Set the foot down into a horse riding stance and look over the right shoulder to your right. That's where you block.

6. **X-Block** - Look to the left, and shift the left foot to open the stance as you turn into a front stance facing front again. The left foot becomes the forward foot. Stab upward with both hands without making a drawing hand chambering action. The hands should finish just above the forehead. Don't straighten the arms. Keep the elbows at about a 90° angle. A little larger angle is OK, but not much larger.

   After holding the block steady for a moment, begin slowly lowering the elbows to the torso and closing your hands into fists. Decelerate as you do this, finishing the motion with great tension.

7. **Two Level Kick** - Hold the hands in position while leaping off the left foot as you front snap kick with the right foot. In the air, front snap kick with the left foot. There should be one jumping action and two kicks in air. The first kick is middle level, and the next kick is high level.

   Most people only perform a knee lift for the first technique and a jumping kick only on the second technique. That's not the correct way to perform this technique nor is it challenging enough for someone ready to learn this kata.

8. **Lower X-Blocks** - When you land, your right foot will touch down first, and then your left. You will end up in a front stance with the right leg as the rear leg. As the left foot touches down, lower level x-block with the wrists in the same posture that they were in while kicking without chambering them.

Turn 180° and look over the right shoulder. Step with the left foot into a new front stance with it as the front foot to your rear. As you turn and the feet pass, pull the crossed wrists up near the right shoulder. As you step forward and the foot touches down, strongly lower level x-block.

The hips are always turned forward facing during an x block in a front stance.

9. **Lower Block** - Pivot in place 180° clockwise and shift your right foot over until the heels are in line. You should finish in a back stance with the right foot forward. This is a quick action that happens as almost a flip of the knees. As you pivot, block with the right fist to the lower level over the right knee. The left hand should finish under the navel. There is no chambering action for this block. From x-block to down block - it's all one motion. Zip!

10. **Lower Sword Hand Block** - Step forward into a new back stance and chamber and block with the left hand in a lower level sword hand block.

11. **Wave Goodbye** - Step forward into a right foot forward front stance. Bring both open hands up in front of your and cross them at the wrist in front of the chest quickly. The palms should face inward toward your face. The right hand should be inside of the left hand. Decelerate and add tension as the wrists turn over so that the palms face outward. Wedge block outward with both hands until the fingertips are shoulder height and the elbows are shoulder width. Keep the elbows at 90° angles throughout the motion.

12. **Repeat - Sort of** - Turn to your left pivoting on the right foot into a new horse riding stance facing your left. Cross the hands again, this time cross them palm outward with the left hand on the inside. Turn over the wrists so that the palms rotate to face inwardly and wedge block outward in a double inside block fashion with the same specifications above. Decelerate and add tension as you move.

13. **Stand Up** - Straighten the knees, bring the left foot in to the natural stance posture, and look over the left shoulder. Bring the arms down in the downward blocks on either side of the body, quickly at first and then very slowly.

14. **Swastika Stepping** - Look left, and step out into a back stance while lowering the torso directly downward. Block to the right high with an inside block and to the left with a down block. This is a swastika posture or swastika block.

    Step forward into another back stance and repeat the technique above.

    The last step is a little tricky. Look over the left shoulder, and spin counter clockwise while stepping forward again. Repeat the block despite the strange spinning step you just executed.

15. **Lower X-Block** - Tired of X-blocking? You're almost done. Step with the right foot to the left and back so that you end up close to kneeling on the right knee. Block downward with the fists crossed at the forearms. The right arm should be over the left arm.

16. **Wedge Block** - Step to the right with the right foot into a horse riding stance and stand back up. As you stand up, repeat the double inside block wedge block that you performed before, but this time do it with fists. Decelerate and add tension as you perform the technique.

17. **Stand Up and Spin** - Straighten the knees, bring the right foot in to the natural stance posture, and look straight ahead. Bring the arms down in the downward blocks on either side of the body, quickly at first and then very slowly.

    Snap the fists to the waist so that the elbows point outward. Keep the elbows at 90° angles. Pivot the hips around to the left and then the right in a snappy action that brings the right elbow around to snap into position and then the left elbow.

    Continue pivoting on the right foot 180° until you spin into a crossed-leg stance. Wedge block outward with the two, tense inside blocks as before from this different stance.

18. **Stork on a Stone** - It took a while to get to this point, didn't it? Perform the swastika blocks again, but this time decelerate and add tension. As you block. Pull the left foot up behind the right knee and hook it around the leg. Your right knee should be pretty straight.

19. **Squeeze Down** - Bend the right knee slowly as you bring the right fist to a drawn position at the right waist. Bring the left hand up and over the head, and then settle it on top of the right fist in a cup and saucer posture.

20. **Side Snap Kick** - From this position, snap the left foot out and back in a side snap kick. At the same time that you kick, extend the left hand out in a back fist strike at your own shoulder height. Do not snap the back fist back - leave it out there where it is.

21. **Stepping punch** - Step down to the floor with the left foot, but don't form any particular stance. Instead, just pull yourself forward with that foot, and then push with it until you have stepped forward into a right-foot-forward front stance. Punch middle level with the right fist and kiai.

22. **Stork on a Stone Again** - Lift the right foot until you are in the swastika posture again with the left arm high and the right arm low. Squeeze down, and side snap kick with the left foot. This time, however, step with the right foot into a horse riding stance. Immediately punch across the body with a left fist reverse punch. Don't turn the hips or move the knees to punch. Twist at the waist.

23. **Stork on a Stone Reversed** - Now try the above on the other side. Look over your left shoulder, and perform the mirror image of the above exactly, finishing with a punch with the right hand in the horse riding stance.

24. **Sword Hand Block** - Turn 180° to the rear, pivoting on the left foot clockwise, so that the right foot becomes the front foot of a front stance. Block with the right hand in a sword hand block/strike sort of posture. Don't square this off like an

upper level rising block. Block as if it is a vertical sword hand block without the sword hand being vertical.

25. **Elbow strike** - Raise the left elbow upward vertically until the left fist sits vertically next to the left ear. The palm of the left hand should come down and strike the elbow as if you are pulling someone into the strike. The right fingers should point to the left side. Rotate the hips forward as you perform the elbow strike.

26. **Fist in Hand** - Pull the left hand down to the waist in a draw action and open the hand. Pull the right hand down with it, forming it into a fist. The right fist should push into the left open hand at the left waist with the knuckles touching the palm.

27. **Turn and Squeeze Down** - Lift the left foot and spin on the right foot 270° until the right shoulder is pointing in the direction that was forward in the last stance. As you pivot, bring the left foot up behind the right knee. As you turn, the hands should go up over the head and finally end up in cup and saucer position at the right waist. During this motion, open both hands, press the palm heels together, and twist the hands in a pressing side block to the right side just before the cup and saucer.

28. **Side Snap Kick** - Left side snap kick and throw the simultaneous vertical back fist strike at the same time. Leave the fist hanging out there in the air, step down with the left foot...

29. **Stepping Punch** - And step forward with the right leg into a front stance, executing a right side stepping punch. Kiai.

30. **Finish** - After a pause, turn counter-clockwise pivoting on the right foot, pulling the left foot in, until you face the rear in the natural position.

Gankaku



Chinte

Chinte is by far one of the least popular kata among Japanese males in Shotokan Karate. However, among female Japanese, Chinte has quite a following. The reasoning behind this is perhaps the origin of the kata. It is possible that Chinte originated as an Okinawan folk dance, and has since that time been copied by karate experts and has been modified to support fighting techniques.

珍手

Chinte – "Unusual Hands"

Chinte is filled with techniques and movements that could be considered very indicative of Asian folk dance movements. There is a rumor that Chinte comes from a dance that describes to young women the things that they will have to know to survive in the world. Thus, many of the techniques are actually thought to be straight out of a folk dance in which a young woman does such things as show her baby to her friends, learn to discipline her children, and even stroke her husband's ego. The last three techniques of the kata are thought to be symbolic of a young wife bowing and backing away from her angry husband, allowing him to have his way, or at least, to think that he is having his way when really he has been fully manipulated and will now do as she wishes.

Whether or not there is a folk dance that Chinte comes from is the stuff of speculation.

This kata is thought to be paired with Gankaku. Gankaku was originally called Chinto. Chinte and Chinto are supposedly related to each other in that Chinte relates to young women and Chinto relates to older women. However, there is really nothing in the kata that supports this belief. There are two Chinto kata, and the Shotokan version of Chinto may not be the one that should be paired off with Chinte.

One place where Chinte is a unique kata is in the use of elbow strikes to the upper level. Chinte, unlike many other kata, contains these strikes, as well as many other unusual and rarely performed techniques. The scissors punch, the two finger punch, and other techniques help to give Chinte its name: Unusual Hands. Other translations include Weird Hands and Amazing Hands. No matter the translation, it is apparent that Chinte is unusual, weird, and amazing in the wide variety of techniques that are packaged with it.

The variety of strange techniques in Chinte is another reason that the kata is thought to be more appropriate for women. M any of the strikes are to areas that are not as vulnerable to a women so much as a man. Also, the two finger strike is indicative of using technical prowess rather than raw force, unlike most Shotokan Karate strikes. Therefore, many believe that the techniques of Chinte are better suited to a female with more need to take advantage of the Unusual Hands.

The last three techniques befuddle most who view them. In fact, there are many karate kata experts who despise the kata Chinte because of the hopping backward at the very end. What is the meaning of this motion? Some say it could be a young women acquiescing to her husband, father, or even her mother-in-law (most likely). Whatever the meaning of those last three hops, they bring the kata back to the starting place, and therefore cannot be avoided by kata competitors.

Hopping On
But the truth seems to be that at some point, someone added the three hops onto the kata to bring it back to the starting place. Other styles that practice this kata Chinte do not have the hops, and simply leave the kata finished in a different place.

Directions for Chinte

1. **Closed Feet Stance** - This kata begins with both feet together, touching from heel to big toe. If you move to this position straight from a bow, such as during practice in a class, then you will have to bring the balls of your feet together. If you are moving to this posture following the natural position, as in a tournament, then you will have to bring the right foot up to the left foot and start from there. Place the left fist in the center of the stomach with the knuckles pointing to the right side, palm side up. Place the right fist on top of the left one vertically cup and saucer style.

2. **Over Hand Bottom Fist Strike** - Look right. Raise the right fist up turning the palm side away from the body. Go straight up to your own height, and then start going over to the right side. When the right elbow reaches shoulder height,

start unfolding it more to complete the strike. Finish with the right fist at shoulder height extended to the right side. Do not move the left hand during this technique.

3. **Repeat** - Bring the right fist back underneath the left, and then extend the left fist to the left side in the same fashion.

   Both of these techniques are performed with increasing tension and deceleration. There is very little pause between the two techniques.

4. **Double Sword Hand Block** - Pivot on the right foot and step forward with the left foot so that you are in a new horse riding stance facing to the right of your previous position. At the same time that you turn into the new stance, raise both hands upward with the finger tips touching at the index and middle fingers. Raise the hands upward over your height with the elbows outward. Your thumbs should be tucked in. Perform this motion quickly.

5. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Look right. Shift the right foot to the right about 1 foot, and change the stance to an unmovable stance. As you shift, fold for the vertical sword hand block by bringing the right hand underneath the left as the left reaches across the body. Block strongly and quickly. Without pausing, continue to the next technique.

6. **Vertical Punch** - So far, all of this kata is "Weird Hands." Reverse punch with the left fist into the palm of the right hand with a vertical punch. Rotate the hips fully to front, and change the stance to a front stance.

7. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Step forward into a new unmovable stance with the left foot forward and execute a vertical sword hand block again.

8. **Vertical Punch** - Punch with the right fist vertically into the open palm of the left hand. Rotate to front and stand in a front stance. Perform the block and punch as a pair again.

9. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Step forward into a new unmovable stance with the right foot forward and execute a vertical sword hand block again.

10. **Vertical Elbow** - Shift into a front stance again, but this time bring your left elbow up strongly to your own nose height. Keep the left fist near to the ear. Kiai on this technique.

11. **Sword Hand Block** - Pivot 180° to the left on the right foot into a new back stance. At the same time, sword hand block strongly with the left hand. From the elbow strike, reach over the right shoulder with the left arm and straighten the right arm to fold for the block. Focus the block as you stop pivoting. Remember to reach with the fold in the direction you will block - not just any direction.

12. **Sword Hand Block** - Step forward and sword hand block again. with the right hand.

13. **Front Snap Kick** - Without moving the hands, raise the left leg and front snap kick, returning the foot to the place where it was resting before you kicked. Kick to the middle level and no higher.

14. **Cross Block** - As you withdraw the left leg from the kick, fold for a left side down block by reaching over the right shoulder with the left fist. Extend the right arm straight and downward. Unfold them so that the left arm executes a downward block and the right arm performs an inside block. Focus this double handed technique as you step the left foot back down strongly. The hips should be facing forward.

15. **Lower Level Inside Block** - Step the left foot up to the right into a new close feet stance. As you step up, draw the left fist back to the waist. Turn the right fist over, straighten and lower the arm, and then block in an outside to inside fashion with the inside of the right wrist across the lower level. Continue swinging the arm around up and over the head, and then around and down from the outside inward. Focus the strike as a bottom fist strike performed like a lower level outside block. Stop the fist when it is in front of the right leg again.

    The way this should be performed is debatable. In tournaments, trophies have been awarded by Nakayama's students to performers who do this and the next two motions quickly. However, Nakayama's Best Karate Volume 9 recommends that the techniques be performed with slow, increasing tension and deceleration.

16. **Lower Level Inside Sword Hand Block** - Step back with the right foot into a new horse riding stance facing the left side while looking over the left shoulder. The pivot is accompanied by a shifting action where both feet move to he rear about six inches. You should still be facing the direction you were in the last technique. As you step back, raise the right and left hands to the left side with the elbows straight. Swing both arms, with open hands, around over the head from left to right, and then around and back to the left from the right on the lower side. When you finish, your open right hand is on your abdomen in a sword hand posture with the palm facing up as in any sword hand block. The left hand is also palm up, though, and it is in a position to down block to the left side with the inside of the left wrist. Some people like to put their draw hand lower on their abdomen, sometimes much lower, when they are performing low level sword hand blocks. There is nothing wrong with pointing both hands at the same point in space if you prefer to do this.

17. **Lower Level Inside Sword Hand Block** - Look to the right. Shift to the left with both feet about six inches as you repeat the large, circular, lower level sword hand block that you just performed to the right side.

18. **Double Handed Inside Block** - Look straight ahead. Shift to the left again about six inches. As you shift, fold the arms for the double inside block by putting the right arm under the left and then unfolding them. Focus the block at the end of the shifting action.

19. **Double Handed Down Block** - Step the right foot up to the left knee, as in Gankaku, and hook it behind the leg. As you bring the foot up, reach with both

arms, hands in fists, to the sides, then up, and then over the top of the head. Cross them in front of the chest, and then bring them downward and out to the sides in downblocks to the sides. This movement is fast and strong.

The timing for the last three techniques is 1-2-3.

20. **One Knuckle Fist Strike** - Step forward with the right foot into a new front stance. Draw the left arm back, turn the hips to the side facing position, and swing the right arm, elbow straight, back, around, over the head, and then down to chest height in a one-knuckle fist (middle knuckle).

21. **One Knuckle Fist Again** - Rotate the hips forward in place as you bring the left hand out, back, over the top, and then down on top of the right hand in a one knuckle fist.

22. **Inside Block** - Fold the right arm under the left, turn the hips to the side, and inside block in place with the right arm. The weird hand part here is that your index and middle fingers are extended.

23. **Two Finger Punch** - Step forward with the left foot and execute an upward rising high level two finger stab to the eyes with the index and middle fingers extended.

24. **Two Finger Inside Block** - Turn 180° to the rear by pivoting counter-clockwise on the right (rear) foot and assume a left leg front stance. Inside block with the two finger hand again.

25. **Two Finger Punch** - Step forward and punch as before with the upward rising action and the two fingers.

26. **Palm Heel Strike** - Pivot to the left 90° on rear/left foot. Step across to the left into a new right foot forward unmovable stance with the right foot. From the outside inward in a wide strike from the side strike with the palm heel to the middle level.

27. **Palm Heels Together** – Bring the left hand around the same way and strike with a palm heel into the other hand. When you finish, both hands will be palm heel together in front and in the centerline of your body. Best Karate indicates that you should be in an unmovable stance, but the performer, Oishi, is clearly in a front stance. Do the front stance. The print is a typo.

28. **Scissor punch to the rear** - From the previous position, bring both hands behind you while bending forward a bit to allow them to reach back in fists and double round punch to the rear quickly.

29. **Scissors Punch** – While the fists are extended behind you, quickly pivot to the rear on the right foot into a new unmovable stance. The left foot should move over to the left about 2.5 feet as you turn counter-clockwise. Bring both arms up and out from the body, and then punch inward with two round punches at chest level.

30. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Step forward into a new unmovable stance with the right foot forward and execute a vertical sword hand block again.

31. **Vertical Punch** - Punch with the left fist vertically into the open palm of the right hand. Rotate to front and stand in a front stance. Perform the block and punch as a pair again.

32. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** - Step forward into a new unmovable stance with the left foot forward and execute a vertical sword hand block again.

33. **Vertical Punch** - Punch with the right fist vertically into the open palm of the left hand. Rotate to front and stand in a front stance. Perform the block and punch as a pair again. Kiai on this technique.

34. **Hop Backwards** - To finish, draw the right foot back to the left in the closed feet stance, and perform the hand over fist posture with the right hand in the left fist in front of the chin. Now, hop backwards 3 times about 4 inches at a time. 1-2-3. Then you are finished.

Chinte



Sochin

Sochin is one of the most popular of all of the Shotokan kata for a very good reason: it is simply beautiful. Sochin's powerful and heavy rhythm is not plodding and jerky like the rhythm of Jion. Unlike Unsu, Sochin contains no acrobatics. Performing this kata does not require high jumping, twisting, turning, nor ducking. However, it isn't easy. Sochin is quite a challenge as kata go, and the applications possible from these movements are particularly interesting.

壮鎮

Sochin– "Grand Suppression"

Sochin is composed of two characters: SO CHIN. Most people mispronounce the name of the kata by saying the last syllable as if it were chin - like the chin on your face. This character should be pronounced *cheen*, not *chin*. The characters themselves have interesting meanings that are different from the silly explanations given in some of the more popular books about Shotokan Kata. So can be interpreted as "robust, manhood, ancient peace, energetic, vigorous, or grand." Chin can mean "suppress, put down by force, or to make calm." Chin is also pronounced as the common Japanese verb shizumeru - to calm down.

I like "Grand Suppression." It makes me think of a punitive military strike against some heathens, and somehow it is fitting for the Japanese view of life. It probably should be interpreted as something more like "Energetic Calm." That's much more Zen sounding and more likely to send chills up and down the spine of someone obsessed with all things Japan.

Nakayama doesn't bother to translate the name for us in his Best Karate series. That's probably just as well, considering the horrible job the translators did with Bassai in Best Karate Volume 6. In his book on kata, ***Karate Kata Zenshu,*** Kanazawa writes that this kata is called Sochin because of the use of the sochin stance throughout the kata. However, I doubt this is the case. The stance is more originally referred to as fudo, not sochin, and the Japanese nick-named the stance the Sochin stance because of the kata - not the other way around.

Sochin is considered by some kata experts to be paired off with Seienchin, a Naha-te (Goju-Ryu) kata whose name means "Blue Cloud Battle."

Sochin may be better analyzed using the original Sochin kata from Shito-Ryu that this kata was hacked from - probably by Funakoshi's son Yoshitaka. For one, Shotokan Sochin makes heavy use of the unmovable stance (Fudo), and Yoshitaka is well known to have preferred this stance above all others. Where we see this stance, we probably see his influence. Especially here.

There are similar techniques between the Shotokan Sochin and the Sochin of Shito-Ryu. There is one portion where the wrists cross during an underhand spear hand followed by a kick which is similar. And, one could also point out that the two, tense inside blocks have simply been expanded outward into an upper block and down block combination to mix up the techniques a little.

There are also elements of Shotokan's Sochin that look like parts of Seienchin. Perhaps Funakoshi learned both Seienchin and Sochin of Shito-Ryu, and then merged them into a single kata containing some of his favorite movements.

Hakko
Funakoshi originally tried to rename this kata from its Okinawan name of Sochin to a Japanese name of Hakko. As with many of Funakoshi's attempts to rename kata, Hakko was not adopted by his students, and they kept calling it Sochin. Funakoshi grossly



Hakko– "Eight Storms"

miscalculated the Japanese resentment of Okinawa. The Shito-Ryu style has propagated very nicely using solidly Okinawan names for their kata. Hakko was a bust. While we dumped Pinan for Heian, we kept Sochin. No one seems to know why some of Funakoshi's new names succeeded while others failed miserably.

Hakko is composed of two characters. The first character is Hachi - "eight." The next character is Ko - "rough, wild, violent, stormy, devastate, lay waste, go to ruin." My preference? Eight Storms. Since this is another Japanese name, and not a standard word, there is no perfect translation without the creator's words on what the name was supposed to mean. Choose what you like. I think Eight Storms is more likely than Eight Devastations, even if you prefer that one.

Incomparable Swastikas

The very first technique in Sochin is repeated four times in the kata. This posture is called **muso-gamae** - "incomparable posture." Performed with some understanding of artistry, this posture is indeed beautiful. However, artistry means that you must understand how lines blend together to form an artistic piece. Simply posing like this is equally ugly when performed even slightly off from ideal.

In order to beautify your technique, a 10 second lesson in sculpting bonsai trees would be a good idea. People who make their techniques pretty are very good at creating 45° angles in their limbs and torso. Anything off of ninety degrees should be a forty-five degree angle. Just like the ideal shape of a bonsai tree, the human body is most beatiful at 90 and 45° angles.

For a technique like Muso-gamae, the importance of these angles cannot be overemphasized. Most people who perform this kata make this first technique, perhaps the single most distinctively beautiful posture in Shotokan kata, a tragedy in bad artistry. The left arm should not angle upward. The right arm should be placed at a 45° angle to the left arm - forming a triangle. This man is off slightly, but many others perform this even more haphazzardly. Simply performing an upper block and a down block doesn't cut the mustard at this level of kata performance.

The other repeating technique in this kata is the **manji-gamae** - "swastika posture." One arm is raise in an upper level inside block to the rear, the other is lowered in a lower level block to the front. Don't be offended by the swastika. The Japanese use a swastika that is reversed from that used by the Nazi Party in Germany to indicate a particular religious group. The Japanese usage is much older. However, I wouldn't go around painting this symbol on the back of my karate uniform.

From Shito-Ryu?

Kanazawa tells us that this kata only exists in the Shotokan and the Shito-Ryu systems. Apparently in Shito-Ryu, he claims, the kata begins in a cat leg stance (nekoashidachi). And so it does. The Sochin from Shito-Ryu has only a few components similar to the Shotokan Sochin. The Shito-Ryu version begins as the Shotokan version of Unsu does, with the circular patterns drawn on the floor with the big toe while stepping in a cat leg stance. The first few techniques are double armed inside blocks, as in many versions of Seisan. The kata is missing the unmoving stance completely, and muso-gamae is not to be seen anywhere.

The original kata is very closely related to Tensho as well. Only a few techniques help one to recognize it is the source of our current Sochin kata. Unlike the comparison between Shito-Ryu's Unshu and the Shotokan Unsu, the Shito-Ryu Sochin must be looked at closely for similarities, but they are the same kata.

However, the Shito-Ryu version does contain the final kick, and the palm-up spear hand thrust. The Shotokan version, was more of a complete re-write than an adaptation, as is the case in Unsu. There are only hints of inside blocks in the Shotokan version, and they have been expanding out into large scale techniques.

Kenzo Mabuni apparently reported that his father learned this kata from Higaonna Kanryo, his instructor of the Naha style of karate (Goju-Ryu).

How did this kata get into the Shotokan system? Legend says that Funakoshi Yoshitaka is to blame. Apparently bored with his father's teachings, he set out to train in the Shito-Ryu style and pull from Mabuni some of his better kata and methods. The result is that Shotokan now contains Nijushiho, Sochin, and Unsu.



Todaiji – The Largest Wooden Structure on Earth

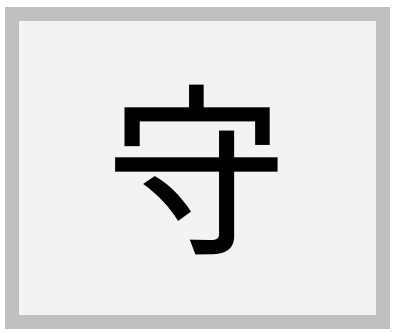
The Temple Guardian

While traveling in Japan, I stopped in Nara to tour the Todaiji. I have a special love of Japanese temples, and Todaiji is the largest ever. The current one is 600 years old, and only 2/3 the size of the original that burned down. It is the world's largest free-standing wooden structure. It's simply gigantic and beautiful. Inside the entry gates of this temple are two statues. One of them is a statue of one of the temple guardians, and guess what he looks like?

That's right. He's on the cover of Funakoshi's book. Isn't that neat? And what posture is that he's in? It's musogamae. Think about that for a minute.

From the Kata X-Files

That character is the character for "protect." If you look at it closely, you'll notice that the enbusen for Sochin follows this character very closely. I performed the kata on a beach with freshly raked sand. I then ran up some stairs and gazed down on my tracks. BINGO! Mamoru was right there staring back at me. I think it is pretty interesting that the kata draws this character on the floor. When I asked a prominent Japanese instructor about this, he denied that it was there and told me it was just my imagination. What do you think? I think it's pretty obvious.



"Protect"

So, then the question becomes this: Is Sochin an ancient word for "protect" on Okinawa? Who can say? But the thought is pretty interesting, and I think that seeing characters drawn out by kata like Sochin and Kanku-Dai that are so representative of their personalities is amazing. The levels of complexity and depth in the kata are always fascinating, and Sochin is no exception.

Directions

1. **Muso-gamae** - Before you begin, where should you stand? I recommend about 4 feet from any wall to your right, and about 8 feet from any wall in front of you. This kata goes left and back for the most part.

   Stand in a natural position with the hands in loose fists at the sides. Begin stepping the right leg forward, and raise the right arm behind you quickly. The left arm should move away from the body a little at this point. Step forward and lower the torso into a deep fudo-dachi as you bring the down block down with the right arm and the upper block upward. The left elbow should point behind you. The left forearm should be parallel to the floor when finished. The left upper arm should be at a 45° angle to the shoulders. The right arm should finish at a 45° angle to the left forearm and the floor. The right elbow should be bent a little more than in a usual downward block, but not overdone. The entire motion begins at 60% speed, increases as the right arm begins to drop to 80%, and then slows gradually approaching zero in a constant deceleration - especially after the arms cross one another.

As you begin the step, you should bend both knees in place before ever stepping forward. Move the body down, then the right foot foward. Gradually bring the weight to bear on the front leg as your right foot becomes planted.

Fudo-dachi, the unmoving stance, is definitely *not* a horse riding stance at a different angle. The stance is a modified front stance. The front leg is the same, but the rear leg is bent and has the knee pushed out as far as possible. The entire stance should be about 1 foot wide. The front foot should point forward, the rear foot should point 45° out to the left. The hips should be strong pressed between the knees, pushing them further apart by bringing the buttocks between the heels rather than behind them. The front shin should be straight up and down, not angled inward. The first step is a crescent shaped motion, but only slightly. Do not make an obvious shape like this. Rather, the crescent step should be quite shallow and subtle.

This technique should require 5 seconds to complete before beginning the next. The last second is a "moment of emptiness." Do nothing for a moment before proceeding.

2. **Reverse vertical sword hand block** - The first half of this motion is performed very quickly. The second half should be performed with increasing tension and slowness in both the hand technique and the stepping action. Reach back toward the armpit with the right hand and forward with the left. The right hand opens immediately upon being withdrawn - on the way back. The left hand remains in a fist. The left foot should be planted 75% of the way through the motion. 75% of the time consumed by this action is that last 1/4 of the entire technique. Move slower and slower as you reach the final position - as if you will never reach it.

   The torso must turn at the waist. It is very important that the rear knee not collapse inward as you perform this technique. In a strong fudo-dachi, there is no way you can turn the hips forward without moving that rear knee. Don't move it. Turn the waist instead, and bring the shoulders forward. People with chronic back trouble: this kata is not for you. You will have to collapse the rear knee to avoid pain and suffering, but the stance will not present itself well for you.

3. **Two Punches middle level** - Perform two punches, both on the same exhalation. They should be performed as one technique. The first punch is fast, the second is strong. The first punch is a snapping punch, the second is a thrusting action. Your draw hand's elbow must disappear behind your back on both punches. Leaving that elbow hanging out as if you are going to square dance is a big, fat, no-no.

   The tempo for the first five actions is: 1.....2.....345.

4. **Swastika Posture** - Snap your head to the left. On the same 1-2 beat of the punches, perform this technique so that the three techniques together are 1-2-3. This technique should be performed extremely fast. The mount/stack-up for this technique is performed with two open hands. Be sure to open both hands very flat so that the fingers are straight. Reach across the body so that the elbows

touch. You should be stretching your back as far as you can reaching across your body. Now perform the blocking motion. The left hand goes down shoulder then elbow with a sharp focus at the end and no residual tension.

The right arm comes back in a horizontally arcing inside block. The fist of the left hand should stay above the head vertically at all times. The arm should focus when it is 180° away from the front leg of the back stance. Do not move it farther back so that the angle of the arms is less than 180°.

Pause for a brief moment before the next technique. Just half a second.

5. **Muso-Gamae** - step forward with the right foot into Muso-Gamae quickly and strongly. Don't stomp a lot, but a little stomp in the step is OK. The hands move strongly into position and complete in time with the finish of the step. Unlike the first technique, there is no settling this time. The knees are in position on focus, and everything happens together so that the fluid body suddenly becomes like a stone statue. Pause again.

6. **Vertical Sword hand block and two punches** - perform exactly as in the first set. Also, in time with the two punches, move to the next Swastika position.

7. **Repeat as necessary!** - Turn 180° to your left after the two punches and perform the quick, strong swastika block posture. Perform the same Muso-gamae as in coming this way on your way back. Perform the vertical sword hand block and two punches again as well. Everything in this set of four techniques is exactly as performed in the previous four. However, you are now traveling back to the starting point.

8. **180° Side Snap Kick** - Pick up the left foot directly to the knee. Do not pull the foot across the floor to the other and then lift. As you pull up the left foot, spin to your left and perform a side snap kick simultaneously with a back fist. Do not bend forward at the waist. If viewed from the target, your knee, buttocks, and left shoulder should be in a straight line on impact. Most people bend at the waist without realizing it. Even the King of Sochin, Osaka Yoshiharu, bends at the waist terribly on this technique.

   Snap the kick back from the impact point sharply. The focus of a snap kick is on the compression that occurs between the legs after the pull-back is complete, not on the impact.

9. **Elbow Smash** - Crush your enemy with the hardest thing on your body: your elbow. Step down into a fudo-dachi, again, turning at the waist to bring the shoulders front-facing since the hips cannot turn that way. Keep the rear knee pushed out. It wants to turn in after the compression of the side snap kick. Your right fist can be fingers down or toward your chest. It doesn't matter - the angle on the elbow is the same no matter which you perform. The very end of the elbow should touch the end of the palm toward the fingers on impact. The target hand should be perfectly flat, not wrapped around the elbow with the fingers separated.

Ninety degree angles always look best. So, try to make the elbow strike line up with the shoulders or only slightly lower. Do not raise the shoulders to perform this technique.

10. **Right Side Snap Kick** - Turn to your right, and without such a dramatic turn, perform another side snap kick, this time with the right leg, but identical and mirroring the one above.

11. **Sword Hand Fan** - Perform the Japanese fan with four sword hand blocks, reversed in direction from Heian Shodan, Nidan, and Kanku Dai. As soon as the elbow of the left hand makes contact, turn to your right 180°, and perform a sword hand block with the right hand. The blocks should have even timing as you perform them. 1..2..3..4. Do not pair them off 1-2..3-4. They should be performed with even rhythm. Be careful to make the 2nd and 4th blocks point exactly in 45° directions. Don't let the angles become more steep or shallow.

12. **Two more sword hand blocks** - Two extra. In a 1-2 count with the one at the end of the fan above, shift the right foot over about 2 feet, so that you are pointing due South of your starting place. Recock the hand and spring it out in a snapping action to perform the sword hand block on the same side again. Do not make a two-step type of plodding motion. Your stacking action should snap very quickly - as it always should during any motion requiring such a mount before the actual strike. Step straight forward and perform one more sword hand block with a normal rhythm.

13. **Underhanded spearing action** - Pull the left hand down from the blocking position and turn the shoulders to front by pivoting the waist - not the hips. The hips cannot turn in a proper back stance with the pelvis to the side and the rear knee pushed back. Stab with the right hand, palm up, with the fingers perfectly flat. Don't bother curling your fingers for spear hands and sword hands. It's a useless action that accomplishes nothing. Flat hands are the correct angles. The forearm should be at 90° to the upper arm. The spear hand should be parallel to the floor, and at a 45° angle to the forearm. As you perform this action, shift forward 6 inches rapidly. Move the left foot and then the right foot to shift.

14. **Front leg front snap kick middle level** - From your current back stance, execute a middle level front snap kick. Do not lean forward or back making this motion. Equally important: Don't let the position your arms are in change at all relative to your body or the surrounding space. Most people lean a lot and wiggle their arms when they perform this.

15. **Stepping front kick and two back fist strikes** - the order of these techniques is apparently up for debate. Some say the order is back fist strike, kick, back fist strike. Others perform the kick and then the two strikes. I prefer to perform strike, kick, strike. It seems to make more sense that way.

    The first strike is performed by punching underhanded to the face level - your opponent's chin or nose - with your left arm. The right arm raises up and travels back beside the face in a covering/guiding action simultaneously. As soon as that strike contacts, you should step forward and perform the stepping front snap

kick - also to the upper level. As your leg approaches the floor, reverse your hands so that you strike with the right hand using your undercut or back fist, whichever you prefer to think of this technique as, and the left hand becomes the guard.

All three techniques should be performed 1-2-3. From the last sword hand block, your goal is to throw these techniques in extremely rapid succession. Also, note the collapsing rhythm. With each technique, the time between each technique should be reduced. The final two are nearly simultaneous.

Yell on the last strike and pause for about 1 second.

16. **Crescent Moon Kick and Muso-gamae** -Turn 180°, it feels like you are going a little farther, and stretch your left hand out. As you turn, move your shoulder so that your hand remains in the same place relative to the room and not your body. Throw a crescent kick into your palm. Without pausing, in one fluid action, stomp down with the right foot. As the foot touches the floor, you should assume Muso-gamae in time with the stomp. Everything must focus together on this technique for you to assume your statue mode appropriately.

    Hold this position dramatically for a long pause.

17. **Inside Blocks and Punches** - Step 45° to your left and inside block. Step in the same direction and punch. Shift 90° to your right and then step forward and block, then step forward and punch again. Make each of these four separate, strong actions. They should be equally timed so that they follow this rhythm: 1..2..3..4.. Don't pair them up block-punch...block-punch.

18. **A dash of Bassai Dai** - Shift the left foot from the 45° angle you are currently on back to zero degrees so that you face front. At the same time, throw a nice inside block with a very strong focus. Immediately throw another inside block. Remember this?

19. **Finish it up with a kick and some hands** - You are nearing the end of the kata. It is imperative that this be the strongest part of your performance. On a test or in a competition, this is the part that sticks in someone's mind. Throw a front snap kick in place. However, when you snap the foot back to the buttocks, let the knee stay up in your chest for an extra moment before you start to set it down. Show very strong contraction of the returning action of the kick.

    Now slowly lower the leg while executing a Jion style technique. Punch slowly with the left hand while pulling, palm down, with the right fist. The right fist should stop at the right nipple.

    Inhale deeply... and punch twice. The first punch is fast, the second punch is strong. Snap the first, thrust the second. Yell on the 2nd punch. Pause for a moment, and then stand back up into the natural position by pulling your front foot back to you. Slowly release the tension of the 2nd punch as you stand and relax. You're done!

Sochin



Nijushiho

Nijushi means "24." Ho can mean "direction", "side", "part", "walk", and "step." Since there are exactly 24 steps within the kata, it is generally believed that Nijushiho was named for the number of steps in the kata. "Twenty-four Steps" is a good translation of Nijushiho. "Twenty-four Directions" is another acceptable interpretation. "Twenty-four Parts" is also thought provoking as is "Twenty-fourth Step."

The original Okinawan name for Nijushiho is Niseishi. Numbers hold different names in Okinawa from their Japanese Mainland counterparts, so the name doesn't translate any



differently on Okinawa other than not having the word "step" at the end. There are apparently two Niseishi kata that have migrated from ancient times to the modern day, one which has nothing to do with Shotokan's Nijushiho. Nijushiho is commonly referred to as an Arakaki kata. The Shito-Ryu Niseishi is virtually identical to the Shotokan version. Mabuni, son of the founder of Shito-Ryu, has said that his dad learned the kata from Kanryo Higaonna. Higaonna picked up the kata from Seisho Arakaki.

The kata is different from the other Shito-Ryu kata attributed to Arakaki Seisho such as Sochin and Unshu in that it lacks the "Arakaki trademark" of the double outward blocks from cat stance, reverse hand thrusts while stepping forward three times. These techniques were apparently removed from the Shotokan version of Sochin when it was ported over by Funakoshi's son. However, the Ryuei Ryu version of Niseishi (similar to the Shito) has them. That would mean that these three kata descend through Shito-Ryu to Shotokan together from the same source, Arakaki Seisho.

The Shito-Ryu version is more than likely the precursor to the Shotokan version.

About Translation of Japanese
The process through which Japanese words are translated has been systemized to a fine art from ancient times. The best way to translate is to pull from a foreign language and then express in your own native tongue what is being said. If you get confused, a native can help you understand the concept behind a word or phrase. However, a native speaker cannot and should not attempt to push translations towards a foreign language. The result is always a disaster, and is probably the reason that some people think that Bassai means "To Penetrate a Fortress." In fact, the problem of Japanese thinking that they can successfully push their words into a native-quality English translation is probably the source of most of the confusion that exists in Shotokan Karate where the meanings of terms are concerned. It would be best if they would submit to having their works written in Japanese and then translated into English by someone not only fluent in English, but with a literary level of writing skill.

This name of this kata cannot be interpreted to mean "Twenty-four Fighting Chickens Marching Towards Victory." In fact, that is where my nick-name was born: One of my friends was claiming that Nijushiho meant "Twenty Four Steps Marching Towards Victory," and I pointed out that the words marching, towards, and victory were not present, therefore the kata name could not mean that. At this point, a squabble ensued, and my friend retorted that my translation could not be the only one allowed, and that I should be more tolerant. The problem with that argument is that if translation ever becomes completely subjective, then the word loses meaning and translation, as well as ordinary conversation, becomes impossible.

Who's Been Mucking With My Kata?
Nijushiho contains two side thrust kicks that modern kata experts are claiming are recent inventions. In fact, when laying blame for the existence of these two kicks, fingers generally point to Asai Tetsuhiko, former Technical Director of the Japan Karate Association. Asai is now leader of his own break-away faction of Shotokan instructors. Originally, these two techniques were knee lifts. Films from the early 1950's and late 1940's show Obata Isao, one of the founding instructors of a large athletic association, performing Nijushiho without performing any side thrust kicks. He lifts his knee straight up without kicking.

Because of the recent revelation of this by the publication of the old films of Funakoshi's classes, some American instructors have stopped performing the kicks, and have returned to performing the knee lifts. Their reasoning is that the kicks ruin the distancing for the applications of the hand techniques surrounding the knee lifts. These instructors feel that the hand techniques are close distance techniques and that kicking

at that point would be quite impossible to explain. Nijushiho, at some point, has come under someone's influence in recent years.

In the older Ryuei Ryu version of the kata, the kicks are complete turns to face the side and front kick without anything performed to the side at all.

It is interesting to note that there are no official documents about Shotokan in which instructors assume responsibility for deliberately modifying the kata. For example, nowhere in the ***Best Karate*** series does Nakayama tell the story of how the Gojushiho kata changed names, and yet there is an interesting story there according to rumors. Likewise, Asai is not given credit for his modifications either. Given the Japanese propensity for accepting responsibility for their actions, it is surprising that no blame is laid at anyone's feet and no credit is ever given to anyone for having influenced the kata.

Apparently, the goal of some Karate organizations is to pretend that the kata we have today have always been this way, and are perfectly preserved. This is not unusual behavior for humans, as we also have certain books we look to for wisdom which we steadfastly refuse to believe have been edited or otherwise tinkered with so that they do not say the same thing today that they did in the past.

Nijushiho is another of the kata taken from Shito-Ryu, heavily modified, which no longer can be considered a Goju-Ryu style kata, but which has it's roots in the Naha city system.

Directions

1. **Natural Stance** - The initial posture for this kata is the natural stance, just like the Heian kata.

2. **Drag and Drop** - Step back into a back stance with right foot. Step very far and drag front foot back about 6 inches as well. With your left hand, execute a pressing-down block by shaping your left arm as if for a hook punch. Open the hand and face it palm downward. Reach far forward with the left hand, and then bring it backward as your stance slides into place.

3. **Pull and Poke** - Shift forward six inches by lifting the front foot and pushing off with the right leg. As you do this, leave the left arm in place and punch with the right fist. You'll have to twist at the waist or collapse your stance. I prefer to leave my stance intact and twist at the waist.

4. **An Elbow for an Eye** - Shift forward as before, but this time, shift into an hourglass stance with the feet about one foot width apart. Begin the technique explosively, but finish by using tremendous tension while moving very slowly. This technique suddenly slows down at the very end. The elbow isn't really at eye level. Shoot it out at just below shoulder level.

   This sequence of three techniques is more interesting if you move the initial block from the left hand to the right hand. Think of the right hand as grabbing the wrist, and the left as pressing on the opponent's elbow. When you punch, you'll want to do it over your hand, not under, but this makes the elbow fit in very

nicely as you pull your opponent's arm further in and drive the elbow into his armpit as you pull his arm with your right hand.

5. **Swirl and Turn** - Turn by pivoting to the rear on your left foot. As you pivot, open both arms wide with the hands open. Raise them upward and around you in a circle until they cross in front of you at the wrists, then pull back strongly to make two draw arms. This techniques actually uses increasing speed as you go through it, which is a little backward from most slow techniques which utilize increasing tension.

6. **U Punch** - Using both fists, punch right fist over left. The right fist punches at chin height, the left fist punches under-handed at the middle level. Perform the punching action immediately following the chambering action above.

7. **What Goes Up** - Raise the right knee into the chest. Simultaneously pull both forearms up in front of the face with the palm sides of the fists inward to the face. The elbows should be touching as should the fists, and the elbows should be at a 90° angle.

8. **Must Come Down** - Set the foot down in front of you in a front stance, and slowly wedge block with both hands. Some people prefer to cross their arms quickly just as they begin the blocking action, rather than simply parting their arms and turning the fists over.

9. **Block and Elbow** - Pivot to the left and raise the right arm up in an open-hand so that it takes the shape of an upper level rising block. Step with the left foot in that direction so that it becomes the front leg in a front stance, and then upper level rising block for real with the left arm. Immediately follow up the rising block with a rising, undercut elbow strike. The fist should be in a vertical position for this strike, as if hitting the underside of the opponent's chin. The right fist finishes next to the right ear.

10. **Swords, Legs, and Punches** - Pivot on the left foot and shift the right foot back a little so that you assume a horse riding stance. Look to the rear, which now becomes the right side as you pivot, and sweep the right hand in a round shape from left to right in a vertical sword hand block. Decelerate the block as it reaches its maximum extension. As soon as the block is complete, raise the right knee to throw a right side thrust kick to the level of your armpit. As you extend the foot from the chambered position (don't pause), pull the right fist to the right hip strongly. After kicking, set the right foot back into the chamber, and then down on the floor into a horse riding stance again. As the foot lowers, punch with the left arm. Straighten the left elbow, don't hook punch, and twist at the waist. Be careful not to collapse the left leg of the stance as you punch.

11. **Repeat Again** - Repeat the above three techniques again to the mirror side without shifting or altering the positioning.

12. **Round Block** - Pull the left foot back to the right so that the heels touch. Send the right foot to the left 45° angle so that it becomes the front foot of a new front stance. The right fist, still hanging from having punched in the previous set of

techniques, should be flipped over so that the palm heel is turned up and the back of the bent wrist is used as a hooking block moving downward. The left hand, also in a palm heel, strikes slowly from overhead as the torso leans into this technique. The finishing posture is something like the Mountain Punch of Bassai Dai, however, the hands are in palm heel postures. The hips should be turned to the side during this technique.

This technique is performed with great swiftness during the leg exchange and the first half of the right handed block, but the second half of the technique, where the right hand finishes blocking and the left joins in to strike from above, is performed with increasing tension.

13. **Ridge Hand** - Pivot in place using both feet to rotate to the left counter clockwise. As you pivot, use the rotation of the body to swing a reverse side ridge hand strike to the upper level (your temple). At the same time, swing the other hand back and around behind you in a horizontal palm heel strike to the rear.

14. **Smack Down** - Now step the right foot up to the left so that you are standing with your feet together. Don't bend the knees visibly. Bring the left arm up in a swinging motion so that the back of the left hand smacks into the upraised palm of the right hand. Kiai on this technique.

15. **Grab and Break** - Step the left foot straight back into the unmovable stance and bring both open hands down and away from each other a little. The left should move as if scooping the underside of someone's lower leg as they front kick. The right should move as if striking with the open palm to the knee cap. It is important that both hands appear to focus downward at the same time as the stance settles in.

    Immediately follow up with a small scale U punch with the left hand in the higher position to a 45° angle downward. Do not lean forward. Act as though you are striking the invisible leg you just grabbed.

16. **Back Handed** - Pivot 180° to the rear so that the right leg becomes the rear leg in a back stance. As you pivot, fold the arms quickly for an back sword hand block with slow, increasing tension. Perform the block quickly and then decelerate as it progresses.

17. **Vertical Elbow** - Step forward into a side-facing horse riding stance with the right foot forward. Strike upward with a vertical elbow strike so that the vertical fist of the right hand finishes next to the ear. The strike is to the upper level. Immediately chamber the right fist over the left shoulder and reach forward with the left arm to prepare for a right downward block. Think of the folding action as a lower level punch with a block accompanying it. Shift the feet toward the right foot 6 inches as you make this punching action. Throw the block as you shift toward the left foot about 6 inches by lifting the left foot and then pushing off with the right. Shift in and out quickly and immediately throwing the punch and then the block.

18. **Another Back Hand** - Pivot 180° and make another back stance and block with the left sword hand again as above.

19. **Another Elbow, But Different** - As you step into a horse riding stance, strike with the right elbow into the left palm so that the arms form a rectangle at middle level in front of the torso as in Bassai Dai. Strike downward, again as in Bassai Dai, with a single down block immediately following the elbow smash.

20. **Another Back Hand** -
    Move the left foot in front of the right so that you take a 90° angle to the line you just traveled up and back. In a back stance, make the same vertical sword hand block. Step in and back out with the vertical elbow strike, punch, and downward block.
21. **Swirly Pull** - Turn 225° to the rear to the left, and step forward with right foot into a three point stance while pulling both hands strongly back into drawn posture. Pivot on the left foot at first. As soon as the right foot is planted, move the left foot as well, shifting it to the right about one foot and forward about one foot so that it becomes the front foot of the stance.

22. **U Punch** - In place, punch with the right hand on the high side and the left on the middle level at the same time.

23. **The Lawnmower Man** - Step forward with the right foot, and back hand block with left and right hands turning them in a circle until the right hand is at the right waist and the left hand is in front of the left shoulder. This technique is extremely difficult to describe in text, but here's an attempt.

    From the U punch, hook the back of the right hand using the back side of the palm heel posture. The left hand does the same. Move both hands clockwise, keeping the palm heels facing into the center of the circle your hands are describing in front of you. Once the hands are vertical with the left on top in front of the face and the right on the bottom in front of the belt knot, they are really facing to the sides now. Rotate your wrists so that they are back-end leading again as you continue around this circle of doom one more time. This time, the palm heel backside blocks (otherwise known as round blocks) never make it back to the vertical position. Instead, pull them to your sides as you draw the circle a second time. The right palm heel is drawn at the right waist; the left is drawn over-hand style at the left shoulder.

    Slowly ease two palm heel strikes forward with the left hand high. Finish by drawing back the right leg into the natural stance.



Meikyo

The name Meikyo is composed of two kanji: bright and mirror. The name of the kata can only be Bright Mirror. The name is probably taken from the opening technique where the performer pulls both palms up to his face and looks in them as if he is holding a mirror. Much like Kanku-Dai, Meikyo contains a symbolic opening technique which defines the name of the kata.

明鏡

Meikyo – "Bright Mirror"

Japan has three national treasures: the jewels kept at a Shinto Shrine in Tokyo, the Sword of Hachiman kept at Atsuta Shrine, and the Mirror of Japan kept at the Grand Shrine at Ise. I have been to visit all of these treasures, but unfortunately the Japanese do not allow anyone, including themselves, to actually lay eyes upon them. The closest you can get is to look at the gates of the fence around the inner sanctum. The reason that I bring up the national treasures is that Meikyo is perhaps symbolic of the Mirror of Japan kept at Ise.

Roots in Rohai
Meikyo is reportedly a Shotokanized Rohai. Rohai is a kata performed in Okinawa that has four particular versions. One version is Matsumura Rohai, the other three are the Rohai left behind by Itosu. Itosu Rohai has three incarnations of Rohai, Rohai Nidan, and Rohai Sandan. Supposedly the Shotokan kata Meikyo is a compilation of Itosu's three Rohai kata.

Sun Worshippers
Meikyo was Nakayama Masatoshi's favorite kata, and as such, he saved if for last in his Best Karate series. In the book *The Martial Arts* by Michel Random, Nakayama is reported to have said that Meikyo is very similar to a folk dance performed to convince the goddess Amaterasu to come out of the cave she hides in. Japanese Shinto legend has it that Amaterasu cried and her tears fell into the Sea of Japan, forming the islands of Japan. She is the goddess of the sun.

Nakayama vs. Kanazawa
The ***Best Karate*** series shows Meikyo as having three sets of blocking and stepping punch combinations. The first two sets contain down blocks. The third set contains inside blocks. However, if you look in Kanazawa's book, there are three different sets. The first set are down blocks, the second set are inside blocks, and the third and final set are upper level rising blocks. Which set of instructions is correct?

I don't know. I would think that the best way to perform it would be the way that the original Rohai kata it is taken from is performed. However it is in Rohai, that's how it should be in the Shotokan kata as well. The other way of doing it would be a more recent modification of the techniques, and therefore not as true to the original.

Presented here are directions based upon Nakayama's ***Best Karate Volume 11,*** since that set of books serves the most people as the standard by which kata are learned and performed more than any other.

Who created this kata? I have a possible suspect: Nakayama himself. I believe that this kata appears last in the Best Karate series because it is Nakayama who created it. The kata is completely unique and only performed by people who practiced Nakayama's style of Shotokan Karate. It never appeared anywhere in print before Nakayama published it in ***Best Karate***. Also, Funakoshi never mentions the kata anywhere in his texts that I can find.

I believe that Meikyo is Nakayama's importing of Rohai into his own system of Karate, and that is why it was his favorite kata. What evidence do I have? Nothing more than speculation... which means my evidence is just as good as any other story about the source of any other kata you might read about.

Directions

1. **Natural Position** - Like Gankaku and Sochin, Meikyo does not begin with any special posture. Simply stand in the natural position with the hands resting at the sides in relaxed fists. There should be no tension in the body as you assume this posture, nor should there be any tension left as you stand here.

2. **Reach and Pull Back** - Reach up with the hands open without bending the elbows until the hands are crossed at the wrists in front of the forehead. Most people do this as a wide, circular action out to the sides. As you begin to reach up, start sliding the right foot out into a horse riding stance as you lower your torso by bending both knees. Pull both hands back, clenching them into fists, and draw both arms back until the fists rest at the waist. Be sure that the elbows are not visible from the front. Perform this technique with deceleration and increasing tension.

3. **Look in the Mirror** - Without any serious tension, keep the elbows close to the sides of the body as you bring your open hands up from their drawn positions to a point in front of the face where the little and ring fingers touch. The elbows should still be torso width apart, so your forearms are in a triangle shape.

4. **Open Handed Wedge Block** - Flip the hands over so that the palms now face away from the face, and slowly add tension and decelerate the arms as you wedge block outward with both hands. The finishing posture should have the hands in front of the shoulders with the elbows at 90° angles.

5. **Down Block and Punch** - Shift the left foot so that it becomes the front foot in a new front stance facing to the 45° angle to the left. Turn the hips to the side as the arm descends to block. Down block strongly as you do this. Step forward and punch middle level along the same angle, bringing the hips squarely to the front as the feet pass and then keeping them front facing for the rest of the step.

   Shift the right foot over 90° to the other 45° angle while throwing a down block, and then step forward and punch with the left hand along that same angle.

6. **Two Tiger Mouth Blocks** - Step forward with the right foot into a new back stance. The step will be somewhat awkward because you must take a heading 45° to your left. Step quickly at first, but the last quarter of the step should decelerate as this technique is performed slowly. As the stance begins to take shape, bring the right forward and up from underneath so that it appears to scoop upward. The right hand should end up over the right knee. Lift the left elbow up and over the head so that the left hand ends up in front of the forehead palm up. Both hands should be palm up and open, and the thumbs should be out.

7. **Stab Downward** - Shift forward about six inches in your back stance. As you shift, close both hands into fists, and then rotate the wrists as you stab downward with both of them. When you are finished, your left hand will be in front of your navel while the right hand will be extended forward to the low level. Shift the left foot forward as you shift into a front stance with the right leg forward as you stab.

8. **Pivot and Turn** - Pivot on both feet into a front stance that faces the rear by looking over the left shoulder and turning counter-clockwise. Perform this quickly in one explosive motion. As you do this, leave your hands where they are in relation to the room, not in relation to your body.

9. **Reach and Pull Back** - Step up with the right foot to the left and then outward so that you are in a new horse riding stance. As you do this, reach forward and

pull back as in the beginning of the kata. Unlike the beginning of the kata, you will not do the mirror looking nor the wedge block, though.

10. **Repeat as Necessary** - From your previous position with both hands at your waist drawn back, fold the arms for a left down block and head out on the 45° angle. Down block. Then, along the same heading, step in and punch middle level. Pivot as before to the right and down block again, then step in and punch at the other 45° angle.

    Step 45° to the left with the right foot as above, slowly decelerating as you perform the two tiger mouths. Stab downward while shifting into a front stance, and then turn, leaving the hands where they were, repeating the motions above. Then step up into the horse riding stance again, performing the reach and pull.

11. **Inside Block and Stepping Punch** - Step out at the 45° angle and perform an inside block in a front stance with the left foot forward. Step and punch middle level. Shift to the right 90°, and inside block as you shift. Step forward and punch with the left fist middle level.

12. **Bottom Fist Strike** - Step to the left 45° with the left foot, assuming a side-facing horse riding stance. Look to your left. As the foot settles, perform a bottom fist strike to shoulder level with your left fist.

13. **Crescent Moon Kick** - Turn the left foot forward, open the left hand, and crescent moon kick into the left palm with the right sole of the foot. Do not step forward, instead, move to replace the foot where it came from. As you set the foot down, assume a back stance with the right foot becomes the rear foot.

    After the kick connects with the palm of the hand, down block strongly with both arms so that the left fist ends up over the left knee and the right fist ends up over the right knee. The blocks are not squared to the room, but rather are aimed in the directions the knees point in the back stance.

14. **Shades of Heian 2** - In place, without stepping, bring both hands up strongly into the opening double armed block of Heian Nidan. The right forearm should end up pointing forward at forehead height, and the left forearm should point at the ceiling. The knuckles of the right fist should line up with the wrist of the left arm as far as height is concerned, but when viewed from the front, there should be a space at least 8 inches wide between the right fist and the left forearm for your face to be seen through.

15. **Double Block Again** - Step forward into a back stance with the right foot becoming the front foot, and bring the arms down to the left waist and then back up again strongly into the same posture as before.

16. **Double Down Block** - Step forward with the left foot into a front stance with the hips square. Block with both hands by crossing them at the wrists and bring each down to the sides of the body pointing out at 45° angles to the floor.

17. **Double Inside Block** - By now you should feel as though Jion and Heian Nidan were mixed and jumbled together in a strange fashion. Step forward again, this time into a back stance. Cross both arms over the torso and then perform double inside blocks that focus when you step.

18. **Snapping Punches** - Shift forward with both feet about six inches as you uppercut punch with both fists from their current positions. Snap the punches and return the hands to their original positions immediately.

19. **Pivot and Upper Block** - Turn to the rear 180° by pivoting on the heels counter-clockwise. As you pivot, reach up over the forehead with the right open hand while you draw back the left hand. Strongly upper level rising block with the left hand as you complete the pivot into a new back stance with the left foot forward.

20. **Triangle Jump** - One thing that's for sure is that Shotokan Kata seems to have an affinity for triangles. You make triangles with your hands at the beginnings of kata, triangle postures, triangles on the floor, and now a triangle in the air.

    Leap off of the left foot and jump upward, smacking the right elbow into the left palm at the mid point. Best Karate says that you should attempt to jump in place, but most people seem to travel about a stance length when they perform this kata. When you complete this jump, you should perform a right handed sword hand block and land in a back stance that has the right foot forward.

    Technically the jump is just like the one from Kanku-Sho, the only difference being the elbow strike and the fact that you change which shoulder you are looking over in mid jump. It is a 360 degree jump. Don't let the fact that you change directions fool you, you are still putting the feet back where they came from, just in different positions because you change which way the back stance faces during the jump. It isn't that hard of a jump, despite all of the press to the contrary in various kata books. The jump in Unsu is much more difficult, and so is the jump and duck in Kanku-Sho.

21. **Sword Hand Block** - Step backward into a new back stance and sword hand block.

22. **Finish** - Pull the left foot back to the natural position and relax.

Meikyo



Gojushiho-Dai

There are two kata in the Shotokan system called Gojushiho. There is a Sho version and a Dai version. The two kata called Gojushiho are rightly paired together. They are so obviously related that only a few techniques within each is really different from the other. The enbusen is the same, the fundamental techniques are extremely similar. The Gojushiho kata are two different interpretations of the same kata.

The name Gojushiho means "54 Steps" or "54 Directions." Like Nijushiho, Seipai, Seisan, and other kata, this is another one that has a number for a name. How unoriginal.

五十四方大

Gojushiho-Dai – "54 Steps" or "54 Directions"

Gojushiho were, and still are, called Useishi on Okinawa. Useishi is the number 54 in the Okinawan dialect of Japanese. The kata were renamed by Funakoshi to Hotaku, which is Japanese for a woodpecker bird. The idea for the name comes from the pecking motion that is in both of the kata near the end where the performer strikes with the forehead in a

snapping, woodpecker reminiscent action. Like Funakoshi's attempts to rename Jiin and Sochin, this name didn't stick and is kept around only as a trivia item. It's too bad the name didn't stick. Woodpeckers are prettier than numbers.

Matsumura Sokon
Gojushiho Dai and Sho are believed to have been created by Matsumura Sokon, the great kata creator and modifier who supposedly grew up with Sakugawa in Tomari City. Matsumura is frequently referred to as Bushi Matsumura, as it was his nick-name. Bushi means "Warrior." Matsumura Sokon is credited with creating a large number of kata, and some karate historians, if you can call them that, say that Matsumura was the very center of kata creation on Okinawa. There is a legend that Gojushiho was his finest and final creation - intended to be the last kata in his system of Tode.

These kata are fairly long, are reasonably difficult enough to spare from intermediate students, and are widely practiced and performed. Although not enjoying the limelight that Sochin and Unsu are right now, Gojushiho Dai and Sho are regularly seen at tournaments, and they often capture very high level awards in kata competition.

Cool Technique Names
Some interesting techniques in the kata include the Flowing Cloud Block, the Flowing Water Back Fist Posture, and the Chicken Head Wrist Block. The Flowing Cloud Block is executed by moving the right hand from front to side in a smooth, guiding motion. Performed properly, the block allows a champion Karate player to display their timing and skill. However, as in the case of most impressive techniques, when a mediocre performer tries it, they are equally shown to be lacking by this extremely visually demanding technique. The Flowing Back Fist Posture begins both kata, and is very beautiful to look at as well.

The Chicken Head Wrist Block appears in both kata, but more so in the more advanced of the two. This technique involves pointing the index finder, folding the other fingers at the second joint, and blocking by raise the hand and using the space behind the thumb as a striking surface. Stranger than the block is its name, which in the US generally causes some shaking heads and a smile or two.

Directions for Gojushiho Dai (Best Karate Name)

1. **Natural Stance** - Yoi in the natural stance with both arms relaxed and the hands in fists at your sides. Flowing Water Back fist Posture (Mizunagare Uraken Gamae). Step forward with a crescent shape into a front stance, position the left fist under the right elbow and the right arm in an inside/outside blocking posture and slowly bring the entire structure upward, then downward and forward with increasing tension in the muscles.

2. **Hand Me a Bucket -** Even Level Vertical Punches (Heiko Tate Zuki). Step to the left with the left foot to a 45° angle, bring both fists back to the right waist, then slowly vertical fist punch with both hands to the front. The fists should come back as the feet come together, then punch as the foot is more slowly extended to the front into a front stance. The beginning of the motion is done

without power and while inhaling. Exhale as the fists punch. Do not quickly and violently snap the fists to the waist in the beginning. Move quietly and slowly.

3. **Hand Me Another Bucket** – Even Level Vertical Punches (Heiko Tate Zuki). Step to 90° to the right side. Move the right foot close to the left foot and then outward to make a new front stance. Bring both fists back to the left waist as before, then punch with two vertical fists very slowly and strongly.

4. **Sword Hand Left -** Left Middle Level Vertical Sword Hand Block (Hidari Tate Shuto Uke). Step forward 90° to the left with the left foot, moving the left foot inward and then outward. Block slowly with a vertical sword hand block with the left hand. Rotate the hips to the side while blocking. Inhale as the arms fold for the block, then exhale slowly and deeply as the sword hand is extended, the shoulders move back, and the chest is expanded.

5. **Punch -** Right Middle Level Reverse Punch (Migi Chudan Gyaku Zuki). Reverse punch with the right fist in place by strongly rotating the right hip to the front by pressing with the rear foot into the floor. This punch snaps back immediately.

6. **Punch** - Left Middle Level Straight Punch (Hidari Chudan Jun Zuki). Without moving the hips, punch strongly with the left hand. The previous technique and this one are paired together in a 1-2 rhythm. Perform both punches in a single exhalation. Do not move the feet. Essentially these two punches are a single double punch.

7. **Kick in Place** - Right Front Snap Kick (Migi Mae Geri). Without stepping forward, front snap kick with the right leg. Replace the foot in the same stance that you kicked from. As the kick snaps back, begin the next technique.

8. **Punch** - Right Middle Level Reverse Punch (Migi Chudan Gyaku Zuki). As the kicking foot arrives at the floor, simultaneously focus a right side reverse punch strongly. The kick and the punch are performed in the same exhalation in a 1-2 rhythm.

   The timing on the sword hand block and punches should be 1….2.3..4.5

9. **Sword Hand Right -** Step forward into a front stance in the 90° angle to the right side while executing a right arm vertical sword hand block. Rotate the hips to the side.

10. **Reverse Punch** – Reverse punch with the left fist

11. **Punch**– Straight punch with the right fist in place

12. **Front Kick** – Middle level front snap kick in place

13. **Punch** – Simultaneously reverse punch while lowering the kicking foot to the floor strongly.

14. **Elbows Away!** – Step 45° to the front with the right foot so that you face the true 0° front wall again, upper cut with an elbow strike, rotate the hips to the side, and finish with the right vertical fist behind the right ear. Don't spend much time in this position. You should move quickly to the next technique 1-2.

15. **Break their knee backwards** – Turn 180° to the rear moving the left foot, open both palms, drive the right palm downward toward the lower level with the hand open in a "tiger mouth" while pulling upward in a scooping action with the left palm so that the left hand finishes palm upward outside the right elbow and travels up the right arm and under it. The left hand should surround the right arm's bottom half and slide up without touching it to behind the right elbow. This is a strong technique performed quickly following the elbow strike.

16. **Chicken Locked** – Step forward into a cat leg stance, begin slowly arcing the right hand upward, with the right elbow sitting on top of the back of the left wrist, into a slow Chicken Head block (using the wrist as a blocking location).

17. **Chicken Loaded** – Lower the left arm slowly with the palm facing outward (looks like a vertical sword hand block), raise the right Chicken Head Block upward so that the index finger points forward and the back of the right hand is beside the right ear slowly.

18. **Chicken Attack!** – Shift both feet forward, the front foot moving first, so that the stance is reconstructed about 12 to 18 inches forward of the previous position. At the same time, move your right hand downward sharply, so that the index finger strikes to the lower level in a stabbing motion. The left hand should be beside the inside of the right elbow at this point.

19. Stab with the left index finger spear hand to the lower level.

20. Alternating sides, quickly strike once more in the same fashion with the right hand. These three techniques should be performed 1….2.3 with a fast pace.

21. **Chicken Locked** – Turn 180° to the rear, moving the Chicken Head Block of the right hand across the lower level in an arc from the right to the left and back to the right again in front of the shoulder in a sweeping motion, and then upward in an inside outward arcing action. Step forward at the same time with the right foot, describing a small circle on the floor with the tip of the right big toe. Do all of this simultaneously, smoothly, and slowly with tension.

22. **Chicken Loaded** – Lower the left arm slowly with the palm facing outward (looks like a vertical sword hand block), raise the right Chicken Head Block upward so that the index finger points forward and the back of the right hand is beside the right ear slowly.

23. **Chicken Attack!** – Shift both feet forward, the front foot moving first, so that the stance is reconstructed about 12 to 18 inches forward of the previous position. At the same time, move your right hand downward sharply, so that the index finger strikes to the lower level in a stabbing motion. The left hand should be beside the inside of the right elbow at this point.

24. Stab with the left index finger spear hand to the lower level.

25. Alternating sides, quickly strike once more in the same fashion with the right hand.

    Some people prefer to do the index finger stabs to the middle level, also with the preparatory blocking motion, but they point the hand downward at the wrist so the fingers still land pointing down but at middle level.

26. **Throw the Baby out with the Bath Water** – Turn 270° to the right side moving the left foot and using the right foot as a pivot. Finish in a horse riding stance, facing to the left, and execute a swift inside outward double open handed block.

27. **Cross Your Feet** – Step the right foot across the left foot very quickly at first, and then slow and pause for a moment.

28. **Throw Him to the Floor** – Raise the left foot and knee, both hands in the air, and bring them down strongly together in a double armed downward blocking action.

29. **Another Toss** – Turn and face the right side, quickly snap the hands upward, then bring them down decisively as a double open handed block to the right side in horse riding stance (no stepping).

30. **Cross Your Feet** – Step the left foot across the right as before

31. **Throw Him to the Floor**– Raise the right foot and both arms in the air, bring them down simultaneously with the stomping action into a double handed downward block (using fists).

32. **Chicken Locked** – Move the right foot forward (90° to the left), into a cat leg stance, slowly sweeping the right hand across the lower level then arcing it upward, inside, then outward in a chicken head block. Move the tip of the right big toe in a small inside-outward circular motion on the floor.

33. **Chicken Loaded** – Lower the left arm slowly with the palm facing outward (looks like a vertical sword hand block), raise the right Chicken Head Block upward so that the index finger points forward and the back of the right hand is beside the right ear slowly.

34. **Chicken Attack!** – Shift both feet forward, the front foot moving first, so that the stance is reconstructed about 12 to 18 inches forward of the previous position. At the same time, move your right hand downward sharply, so that the index finger strikes to the lower level in a stabbing motion. The left hand should be beside the inside of the right elbow at this point.

35. Stab with the left index finger spear hand to the lower level.

36. Alternating sides, quickly strike once more in the same fashion with the right hand.

37. **Lower Level Sweeping Block and Sword Hand Strike** – Turn 180° to the rear into a front stance moving the left foot. Sweep the left hand across the lower level, then strongly bring it back to the waist as the right hand comes down in an outside inward sword hand strike to the lower middle level with the palm facing upward. Turn the hips strongly to the front.

38. **Vertically Challenged** – Step forward with the right foot into a front stance, and raise the right hand in a fist over the head, then bring it down slowly into a vertical back fist strike to the front.

39. **Lower Chop Inward** – Quickly outside inward strike to the front rotating the hips strongly forward with a palm upward sword hand strike to the lower level.

40. **Vertical Knock Out** – Step forward slowly with the left foot, and slowly raise the left hand over the head, then bring down a vertical back fist strike slowly at chest level.

41. **Falling Eagle** – Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. Strike to the middle level from above with a large, swinging Falling Eagle Hand Strike with the fingertips.

42. **Eagle On Its Back** – Immediately snap the Eagle Hand upward quickly to the upper level (around the chin).

43. **Front Kick** – Left foot front snap kick in place and simultaneously punch forward with the left hand to the middle level while bringing the right fist vertically beside the left ear – folding the arms as if to perform a down block. The kick will be in-place.

44. **Elbow the Chin** – Bring the kicking foot back and turn 180 degrees so that the left foot becomes the front foot and turn to the left. Raise the left elbow in a horizontal elbow strike to the upper level while executing a simultaneous lower block to the rear. The face is pointed in the direction of the elbow strike. Unlike the other Gojushiho kata, do not lean for this. Stay upright.

    The combination of kick, fold, and elbow should be performed at very high speed and a continuous rhythm.

45. **Chicken Locked** – Slide the right foot up and draw a small circle with the big toe while creating a cat leg stance. Sweep the right Chicken Head Block across the lower level and increase muscle tension as the block comes from the inside out at middle level.

46. **Chicken Loaded** – Lower the left arm slowly with the palm facing outward (looks like a vertical sword hand block), raise the right Chicken Head Block upward so that the index finger points forward and the back of the right hand is beside the right ear slowly.

47. **Chicken Attack!** – Shift both feet forward, the front foot moving first, so that the stance is reconstructed about 12 to 18 inches forward of the previous position. At the same time, move your right hand downward sharply, so that the index finger strikes to the lower level in a stabbing motion. The left hand should be beside the inside of the right elbow at this point.

48. Stab with the left index finger spear hand to the lower level.

49. Alternating sides, quickly strike once more in the same fashion with the right hand.

50. **Give the Baby Another Toss Out the Window** – Turn 270° to the right, pivoting on the right foot. Create a horse riding stance and face to the left side while double open hand blocking to the lower level.

51. **Cross Your Feet** – Step the right foot in front of the left slowly, and pause for a moment.

52. **Lift and Block** – Look forward quickly. Raise the left foot upward strongly and simultaneously execute a left hand vertical sword hand block to the front.

53. **Stomp and Punch** – As the foot lands, right side spear hand thrust to the middle level with the left fist pointing into the right waist (do not draw the hand).

54. **Lower Level Palm Up Blocking** – Strike to the right side with the double open hand blocks in a horse riding stance.

55. **Cross Your Feet** – Step across the right foot with the left, pause for a moment.

56. **Lift and Block** – Raise the right foot and knee into the air strongly while executing a left side vertical sword hand block.

57. **Stomp and Punch** – Strongly stomp the floor with the foot and simultaneously right side spear hand thrust to the middle level as before with the left fist pointed at the left waist and the elbow pointed out.

    56 and 57 are performed using the same hands again in most renditions of these kata. However, my friends of experience and myself agree: You can perform this in mirror image if you like. I have no idea why this is left-right on both sides while in all other kata something like this would be left-right and then right-left.

    I have done it both ways in front of various instructors and have never been caught doing it one way and told to do it the other. I think it falls under the category of petty details.

58. **Flowing Water** – Step forward with the right foot slowly, increasing tension as the flowing water back fist posture is constructed. The right arm lifts up with the fist pointed up at the ceiling, just like the very first move in the kata. Then settle it down with the elbow on top of the left fist. Be careful to construct 90° angles in both elbows.

59. **Bottom Fist** – Step to the rear strongly with the right foot into a side on facing horse riding stance. Quickly bottom fist strike to the left side while looking left (was forward direction).

60. **Charging Punch** – Step back forward into a front stance where you had been standing for the flowing again (the same location as move #59). Middle level punch. [kiai!]

61. **Elbows Out** – Move the left foot toward the right and rotate the body to the left so that you are facing 90° to the side in a natural stance with the feet about 18 inches apart. Bring both fists to the chest and point the elbows outward at shoulder height. Move swiftly and sharply.

62. **Peck Wood** – Head butt to the front from the waist at a 25°-35° angle if viewed from the side. At the same time, swing both fists to the rear in a bottom fist scissors punch to the rear.

63. **Elbows Out Again** – Snap the upper body and the fists back as quickly as possible from the head butting position and return the fists and elbows to their previous positions.

64. **Snap to the Left** – Turn to the left 90° into a front stance. Keep the elbows pointing outward. Turn very quickly in a sharp motion.

65. **Flap Your Wings** – Bring the right foot forward into a cat leg stance, and open both hands into the sword hand position. With the elbows straight, swing the arms upward, crossing them over in front of the chest, and then downward so the fingers are pointing outward and to the sides.

66. **Learn to Fly** – Continue by reversing the direction of the hands and arms. Bring both hands up into a double Chicken Head Block to the front in the same cat leg stance. Bring the arms up increasing to about half power.

67. **Two Beaks Strike** – shift both feet forward so that the cat leg stance is moved about 18 inches forward, but the structure of the stance does not change. Double hand lower level single finger strike and [kiai!]

68. **Snap Back** – Snap both hands back upward in the blocking posture again without any tension. Do this and the previous technique as a single motion.

69. **Load the Chicken One Last Time** – Turn 180° to the rear, bringing the right foot forward into a cat leg stance. Perform the lower to middle level arcing sweep with the chicken head block. Return the right foot to the natural position. Finished.

Gojushiho-Dai



Gojushiho-Sho

It is not widely known that the kata have had their names reversed during the 20th Century. Normally, when there are two kata with the same name, one is the dai ("Big") kata and the other is the sho ("Small") kata. The sho kata is usually much shorter and more complicated, thus the name Gojushiho-Sho means "Small 54 Steps." If you examine these kata, it is pretty clear that they are not named properly. The Dai kata is small-scale and more complicated than the Sho kata. This is not in keeping with the other Dai-Sho pairings such as Bassai-Dai and Bassai-Sho or Kanku-Dai and Kanku-Sho.

五十四方小

Gojushiho-Dai – "54 Steps" or "54 Directions"

Originally, Gojushiho Dai was the name given to the more basic of the two. Containing many back stances and larger scale movements than the original Sho kata, this is the one believed to have been created first and the Sho kata was thought to be added later.

However, it is rumored that in a tournament some years ago, a now very high-ranking

instructor performed the Dai kata while accidentally calling out the name "Gojushiho-Sho!" in the last round of competition on national television in Japan.

According to this story, the judges were befuddled, since the performance was perfect, about what to do with this guy and his misnamed kata. Their solution: give him first place, and switch the names of the two kata. So, today the karate experts who outrank him generally call the more basic kata Gojushiho-Dai. However, most people who are students of his contemporaries refer to it as the –Sho kata, and the Best Karate series of books refer to the more difficult kata as Dai and the easier kata as Sho. Is the story about him true? Probably not. It makes a good story, however.

There is a little evidence to support it. Kanazawa, in his books, names the kata Dai and Sho in the reverse from their names in Best Karate by Nakayama. Kanazawa was a student of Nakayama's, but outranked the man who allegedly performed the misnamed kata. Did Kanazawa reject the renaming of the kata in favor of their proper names? It wouldn't surprise me. Kanazawa is not known for following the pack.

What Happened to Useishi?
Less dramatic and yet more interesting is the question of what happened to the original kata from Shorin-Ryu called Useishi that these two kata were founded on, and who is the person who created from it two separate Gojushiho kata for Shotokan?

Nowhere in any other style do we see these two kata performed. The Shito-Ryu folks perform Useishi, but it looks like a strange combination of these two, probably because it is the source of them.

Directions for Gojushiho-Sho (Best Karate Name)

1. **Flowing Water Block -** Yoi in a Natural Stance with hands at sides relaxed. Flowing Water Back fist Posture (Mizunagare Uraken Gamae). Step forward with a crescent shape into a front stance, position the left fist under the right elbow and the right arm in an inside/outside blocking posture and slowly bring the entire structure upward, then downward and forward. Raise the hand with a slow inhalation and no tension, then begin exhaling as the fist lowers and increase tension.

2. **Wedge Block** (Kakiwake uke). Step forward 45° to the left with the left foot into a back stance slowly. Bring both arms upward with the forearms touching from wrist to elbow and the arms crossed near the wrists. Slowly turn the fists over so that the fingers point to the floor and pull the arms apart and the elbows in toward the body. Inhale slowly with no tension during the first half of the technique, then increase tension and exhale as you wedge the arms apart from one another.

3. **Wedge Block** (Kakiwake uke). Bring the left foot back and cross it in front of the right foot. Step forward 90° to the right with the right foot into a back stance slowly. Bring both arms upward with the forearms touching from wrist to elbow and the arms crossed near the wrists. Slowly turn the fists over so that the fingers

point to the floor and pull the arms apart and the elbows in toward the body. Inhale and exhale as before.

4. **Left Middle Level Vertical Sword Hand Block** (Hidari Chudan Tate Shuto Uke). Turn to the left 90° into a front stance and move the left foot about 2 feet to construct the new stance. Inhale slowly and cross the arms right under left with no tension. Give a long, deep exhale and increase tension to about 70% as you execute a vertical sword hand block with the left hand and rotate the hips to the side.

5. **Right Middle Level Reverse Punch** (Migi Chudan Gyaku Zuki). Quickly exhale and sharply focus a right hand reverse punch by rotating the right hip strongly forward. Do not move the feet.

6. **Left Middle Level Straight Punch** (Hidari Chudan Jun Zuki). Exhale sharply and deeply. Do not move the hips or the feet.

7. **Right Front Snap Kick** (Migi Mae Geri). Exhale sharply and quickly.

8. **Middle Level Chasing Punch** (Migi Chudan Oi Zuki). After snapping the knee for the front kick, quickly step forward and punch with the right hand. Make sure that the hips are perfectly square to the front. Exhale quickly.

9. **Middle Level Vertical Sword Hand Block** (Migi Chudan Tate Shuto Uke). Before moving, quickly snap the head so that you are now facing to the right. Move the right foot across about 90° from the left to the right, reverse sides, and repeat movement #4 on the opposite side.

10. **Middle Level Reverse Punch** (Hidari Chudan Gyaku Zuki).

11. **Middle Level Straight Punch** (Migi Chudan Jun Zuki)

12. **Front Snap Kic**k (Hidari Mae Geri). Step forward with the kick.

13. **Middle Level Chasing Punch** (Hidari Chudan Oi Zuki). After snapping the knee for the front kick, quickly step forward and punch with the right hand. Make sure that the hips are perfectly square to the front. Exhale quickly.

14. **Vertical Elbow** (Migi Tate Enpi). Draw the left foot back from the front of the right front stance. Inhale as you do this. Sharply exhale and right vertical elbow strike so that the right fist ends up beside the right ear. The hips should be side facing in this posture.

15. **Block of the Flowing Cloud** (Ryu Un no Uke). Turn 180° to the rear into a back stance with the right leg as the rear one. Move the right foot inward toward the left foot about 6 inches, then replace it in order to create the stance. With the right hand palm upward, put the right elbow on the back of the left wrist. Bring the entire arm structure across the body Finish the block with the both elbows at 90° and the hips facing squarely to the right side. Exhale calmly and apply only 60% muscle tension to the movement.

16. **Open Hand Crossing Posture** (Kaishu Kosa Gamae) Swiftly move both hands at the same time, lower blocking with the open left hand and twisting the right hand and elbow to create a short, choppy inside outward blocking motion moving the palm from down facing to upward. The hips remain in place side facing. Exhale quickly and sharply focus the movement.

17. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. Stab the four fingered spear hand forward without drawing the striking hand back to the hip. Immediately draw the left hand back to palm in facing the right arm elbow. The left hip should be thrust forward so that the hips and upper body are squarely to front. Exhale sharply and focus as if a punching action.

18. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Hidari Shihon Nukite). Without stepping the feet or moving the hips, stab the left spear hand forward from its resting place beside the elbow. Exhale strongly and focus as before. Make sure to pass the stabbing hand over the wrist of the right hand which is drawing back to beside the left elbow.

19. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Repeat the above action on the other side.

20. **Block of the Flowing Cloud** (Ryu Un no Uke). Turn 180° to the rear into a back stance with the right leg as the rear one. Move the right foot inward toward the left foot about 6 inches, then replace it in order to create the stance. With the right hand palm upward, put the right elbow on the back of the left wrist. Bring the entire arm structure across the body Finish the block with the both elbows at 90° and the hips facing squarely to the right side. Exhale calmly and apply only 60% muscle tension to the movement.

21. **Open Hand Crossing Posture** (Kaishu Kosa Gamae) Swiftly move both hands at the same time, lower blocking with the open left hand and twisting the right hand and elbow to create a short, choppy inside outward blocking motion moving the palm from down facing to upward. The hips remain in place side facing. Exhale quickly and sharply focus the movement.

22. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. Stab the four fingered spear hand forward without drawing the striking hand back to the hip. Immediately draw the left hand back to palm in facing the right arm elbow. The left hip should be thrust forward so that the hips and upper body are squarely to front. Exhale sharply and focus as if a punching action.

23. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Hidari Shihon Nukite). Without stepping the feet or moving the hips, stab the left spear hand forward from its resting place beside the elbow. Exhale strongly and focus as before. Make sure to pass the stabbing hand over the wrist of the right hand which is drawing back to beside the left elbow.

24. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Repeat the above action on the other side.

25. **Double Open Hand Low Level Block** (Morote Kaishu Gedan Uke). Turn 270° pivoting on the right foot, moving the left foot toward in a counterclockwise direction. Make a horse riding stance and face to the left. Both hands snap downward from their previous positions, so that the palms of both hands face upward at the completion of the technique. Inhale when beginning the turn, exhale as the blocks begin to descend from their preparatory positions.

26. **Cross Your Feet** - Step the right foot over the left foot so that the outside edges of both feet are touching each other. Step speedily at first, then slow the step greatly and pause somewhat as the stepping foot reaches the floor. Produce a long inhalation during the step, and remove any existing muscle tension in the previous technique.

27. **Deep Step/Stomp** - Left Hip Posture (Fumikomi-Hidari Koshi Gamae). Raise the knee more than the foot upward strongly and inhale. Simultaneously reach both hands outward. The right hand is palm down, the left hand facing up. Both hands should be in front of the left shoulder, and the elbows are straight. As the foot reaches the floor, the elbows should be drawn back so that the fists rest at the left waist in a cup and saucer position. The right forearm is resting on the stomach muscles.

28. **Double Open Hand Low Level Block** (Morote Kaishu Gedan Uke). Look to the right, and double open hand block to the right side without raise the arms from their current position. Exhale sharply and focus quickly.

29. **Cross Your Feet** - Step the left foot over the right foot so that the outside edges of both feet are touching each other. Step speedily at first, then slow the step greatly and pause somewhat as the stepping foot reaches the floor. Produce a long inhalation during the step, and remove any existing muscle tension in the previous technique.

30. **Deep Step/Stomp -** Right Hip Posture (Fumikomi-Hidari Koshi Gamae). Raise the knee more than the foot upward strongly and inhale. Simultaneously reach both hands outward. The left hand is palm down, the right hand facing up. Both hands should be in front of the left shoulder, and the elbows are straight. As the foot reaches the floor, the elbows should be drawn back so that the fists rest at the right waist in a cup and saucer position. The left forearm is resting on the stomach muscles.

31. **Block of the Flowing Cloud** (Ryu Un no Uke). Move the right foot to the rear into a back stance with the right leg as the rear one. Move the right foot inward toward the left foot about 6 inches, then place it in order to create the stance. With the right hand palm upward, put the right elbow on the back of the left wrist. Bring the entire arm structure across the body Finish the block with the both elbows at 90° and the hips facing squarely to the right side. Exhale calmly and apply only 60% muscle tension to the movement.

32. **Open Hand Crossing Posture** (Kaishu Kosa Gamae) Swiftly move both hands at the same time, lower blocking with the open left hand and twisting the right hand and elbow to create a short, choppy inside outward blocking motion moving the palm from down facing to upward. The hips remain in place side facing. Exhale quickly and sharply focus the movement.

33. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. Stab the four fingered spear hand forward without drawing the striking hand back to the hip. Immediately draw the left hand back to palm in facing the right arm elbow. The left hip should be thrust forward so that the hips and upper body are squarely to front. Exhale sharply and focus as if a punching action.

34. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Hidari Shihon Nukite). Without stepping the feet or moving the hips, stab the left spear hand forward from its resting place beside the elbow. Exhale strongly and focus as before. Make sure to pass the stabbing hand over the wrist of the right hand which is drawing back to beside the left elbow.

35. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Repeat the above action on the other side.

36. **Right High Level Sword Hand Strike** (Migi Jodan Shuto Uchi). Turn 180° to the rear, moving the left foot and pivoting on the right foot. As you turn, inhale, raising the right open hand. Sweep the lower level with the left open hand. Then exhaling quickly, strike with a sword hand with the palm facing upward from the outside inward. Turn the hips so that they are reverse front facing: The right hip should be a little in front of the left hip.

37. **Right High Level Sword Hand Block** (Migi Jodan Shuto Uke). Step forward, making a long, deep inhalation, with the right foot. Turn the right hand over, draw it back about 12 inches, then, exhaling slowly and at half power, step forward move the hand back with the palm down in a blocking action. The hips should face to the side.

38. **Left High Level Sword Hand Strike** (Hidari Jodan Shuto Uchi). Inhale quickly, raising the left arm. Very quickly exhale, and strike to the neck with an outside inward, palm-up sword hand. Rotate the hips to the reverse half front facing position.

39. **Left High Level Sword Hand Block** (Hidari Jodan Shuto Uke). Step forward, making a long, deep inhalation, with the left foot. Turn the left hand over, draw it back about 12 inches, then, exhaling slowly and at half power, step forward move the hand back with the palm down in a blocking action. The hips should face to the side.

40. **Reverse Side Facing Right Inside Block** (Gyaku Hanmi Migi Chudan Uchi Uke). Inhale and fold the arms for an inside block. Sharply exhale, blocking with the right hand, but do not move the feet. Rotate the hips strongly to the left, thrusting the right hip so far that it is in front of the left hip.

41. **Right Front Snap Kick** (Migi Mae Geri). Strongly kick with a sharp exhale with the right foot.

42. **Right Flowing Block/Left Falling Punch** (Migi Nagashi Zuki/Hidari Otoshi Zuki). After the kick snaps back, strongly thrust forward with the right foot, bringing the left foot behind it and cross both feet at the ankles. Punch to the lower level with the left arm while pulling the right fist back over the left shoulder. Exhale. Focus.

43. **Rear Lower Sweeping Block** (Ushiro Gedan Barai). Facing in the same direction without moving the gaze, shoot the left foot backward so that it becomes the front foot of a front stance. You should be facing over the rear leg of the front stance. Strongly down block to the direction that you are facing (over the rear leg). Your eyes should be looking underneath your right shoulder.

44. **Block of the Flowing Cloud** (Ryu Un no Uke). Turn 180° to the rear into a back stance with the right leg as the rear one. Move the right foot inward toward the left foot about 6 inches, then replace it in order to create the stance. With the right hand palm upward, put the right elbow on the back of the left wrist. Bring the entire arm structure across the body Finish the block with the both elbows at 90° and the hips facing squarely to the right side. Exhale calmly and apply only 60% muscle tension to the movement.

45. **Open Hand Crossing Posture** (Kaishu Kosa Gamae) Swiftly move both hands at the same time, lower blocking with the open left hand and twisting the right hand and elbow to create a short, choppy inside outward blocking motion moving the palm from down facing to upward. The hips remain in place side facing. Exhale quickly and sharply focus the movement.

46. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Step forward with the right foot into a front stance. Stab the four fingered spear hand forward without drawing the striking hand back to the hip. Immediately draw the left hand back to palm in facing the right arm elbow. The left hip should be thrust forward so that the hips and upper body are squarely to front. Exhale sharply and focus as if a punching action.

47. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Hidari Shihon Nukite). Without stepping the feet or moving the hips, stab the left spear hand forward from its resting place beside the elbow. Exhale strongly and focus as before. Make sure to pass the stabbing hand over the wrist of the right hand which is drawing back to beside the left elbow.

48. **Four Finger Spear Hand** (Migi Shihon Nukite). Repeat the above action on the other side.

49. **Double Open Hand Low Level Block** (Morote Kaishu Gedan Uke). Turn 270° pivoting on the right foot, moving the left foot toward in a counterclockwise direction. Make a horse riding stance and face to the left. Both hands snap downward from their previous positions, so that the palms of both hands face

upward at the completion of the technique. Inhale when beginning the turn, exhale as the blocks begin to descend from their preparatory positions.

50. **Cross Your Feet** - Step the right foot over the left foot so that the outside edges of both feet are touching each other. Step speedily at first, then slow the step greatly and pause somewhat as the stepping foot reaches the floor. Produce a long inhalation during the step, and remove any existing muscle tension in the previous technique.

51. **Vertical Sword Hand Block** (Hidari Tate Shuto Uke). Raise the left knee into the chest, and block with an inhalation at about half force with a right side vertical sword hand block.

52. **Middle Level Punch** (Migi Chudan Jun Zuki). As the foot stomps into the floor, punch strongly with the right fist to the middle level with a sharp exhale at full power.

53. **Double Open Hand Low Level Block** (Morote Kaishu Gedan Uke). Look to the right, and double open hand block to the right side without raise the arms from their current position. Exhale sharply and focus quickly.

54. **Cross Your Feet** - Step the left foot over the right foot so that the outside edges of both feet are touching each other. Step speedily at first, then slow the step greatly and pause somewhat as the stepping foot reaches the floor. Produce a long inhalation during the step, and remove any existing muscle tension in the previous technique.

55. **Left Vertical Sword Hand Block** (Hidari Tate Shuto Uke). Raising the right knee into the chest strongly, block with a vertical sword hand at half power while inhaling.

56. **Right Middle Level Punch** (Migi Chudan Jun Zuki). As the right foot stomps into the floor, focus a right middle level punch with a sharp exhale.

    55 and 56 can be performed in reverse with the right and then the left hand. The same is true for this kata as it is for Gojushiho-Dai. Why these techniques are performed left-right and then left-right again is a mystery that no one seems to have the answer to.

57. **Flowing Water Back fist Posture** (Mizunagare Uraken Gamae). Step forward with a crescent shape into a front stance with the right foot. Position the left fist under the right elbow and the right arm in an inside/outside blocking posture and slowly bring the entire structure upward, then downward and forward. Raise the hand with a slow inhalation and no tension, then begin exhaling as the fist lowers and increase tension.

58. **Left Bottom Fist Strike** (Hidari Chudan Tettsui Uchi). Step back with the right foot into a sideways facing horse riding stance. Strike to the left with a bottom fist. Although the technique is formally called on to be performed at the

middle level, most experts seem to prefer to perform the strike at shoulder level for aesthetic reasons.

59. **Right Middle Level Chasing Punch** (Migi Chudan Oi Zuki). As soon as the horse riding stance becomes stable, step forward quickly back into the front stance and execute a right side step in punch. KIAI strongly.

60. **Extend Both Arms Forward** (Ryo Wan Zenpo Nobashi). Draw the left foot back toward the right into a natural stance with the feet about 18 inches apart. Face to the left 90° while drawing back the foot (turn counter clockwise). Raise both arms out to the front with each fist in front of its respective shoulder - the fists are not touching. Inhale and do it without any muscle tension or focus.

61. **Woodpecker Strike/Rear Bottom Fist Scissors Strike** (Hotaku Uchi/Ushiro Tettsui Hasami Uchi). Bend at the waist at about 30°, and head butt the imaginary opponent with the forehead. At the same time, swing both arms to the rear, striking with double bottom fist strikes. Snap this technique back... exhale strongly and focus quickly on impact.

62. **Both Hips Posture** (Ryogoshi Gamae). Snapping the head back up straight and the fists back, immediately put the fists into the waist pointing inward (as if punching yourself). Inhale as you do this and do it relaxed without power.

63. **Cross Your Feet** - Turn to the left 90° moving the left foot out a little to provide width for a front stance. Keep the fists on the hips, and move quickly and powerfully, as if throwing someone off of your back through the motion.

64. **Both Hands Open Posture** (Ryokaishu Gamae). Step forward with the right foot into a cat leg stance. Raise both hands open over the shoulders and head so that the arms temporarily look like a big V. Continuously move the arms, though, so that they eventually cross in front of the chest, and then expand again in an upside down V shape with the finders pointing outward and down at the sides of the body. Perform a long inhale as you raise the arms, then exhale deeply as you cross and lower them.

65. **Double Handed Chicken Head Block** (Morote Keito Uke). With half power and a long inhalation, bring both hands upward and outward (when you finish, your elbows should touch the front flank of your sides and your forearms should be angled outward slightly).

66. **Double Handed Blue Dragon Sword** (Morote Seiryuto Uchi). In the cat leg stance, shift both feet forward about 18 inches to 2 feet, and simultaneously exhale sharply and strike to the lower level with both hands (as if striking with vertical sword hand blocks with forward trajectory). KIAI strongly.

67. **Block of the Flowing Cloud** (Ryu Un no Uke). Turn 180° to the rear into a back stance with the right leg as the rear one. Move the right foot inward toward the left foot about 6 inches, then replace it in order to create the stance. With the right hand palm upward, put the right elbow on the back of the left wrist. Bring the entire arm structure across the body Finish the block with the both elbows at

90° and the hips facing squarely to the right side. Exhale calmly and apply only 60% muscle tension to the movement. FINISH by drawing the left foot back into a natural stance and lowering the arms into fists.



Unsu

The two characters that make up the name Unsu are Un and Shu. "Cloud" and "Hand" are their respective meanings. The word could be interpreted as "Cloud Hands", "Cloud Hand", "Hands in the Clouds", "Hands Like the Clouds", etc. "Cloud Hands" is probably the best translation of the word Unsu. The name can also be pronounced Unshu.

The Shotokan Unsu kata is distinctly different from the kata in Shito-Ryu called Unshu. Unshu is obviously the source for the Shotokan kata. They are very close in technical performance, except that the Shito-Ryu version, commonly accepted as the older version of the two, does not contain a jump nor does it have the fast rhythm of Shotokan's showiest kata.

While written with the same kanji, the pronunciation change is generally used to differentiate between the two different versions: Unsu for Shotokan and Unshu for Shito-



Unsu – "Cloud Hands"

Ryu.

Shito-Ryu Unshu also has back thrust kicks from the floor instead of Shotokan's round kicks, and the four direction punching is only to three directions, and is not performed at the fast pace that Shotokan's Unsu is.

While these are the same kata, Shotokan's has been revised almost specifically to appeal at tournaments, it seems, in comparison to the Shito-Ryu version. In Shito-Ryu, I doubt many choose Unshu as the absolute favorite kata for performance art competitions.

Head in the Clouds
This kata is probably the most popular and effective tournament kata in the Shotokan Karate competition arsenal. A 360° turn leaping in the air is one of the techniques that is an effective crowd pleaser. The kata is also full of dynamic rhythm changes that make it beautiful to watch.

Because the other Shotokan Kata are so much less athletic and intense to perform, there really isn't a second choice kata when it comes to acrobatics and playing to a crowd in a competition. This is especially true in open competition where rules are not being used. When the other competitors are performing kata that they have obviously tinkered with or even invented on their own, Shotokan kata experts usually pull Unsu out as their weapon of choice. Where Shotokan experts look for demonstrations of basic techniques that are crystalline pure and carefully detailed, Unsu provides so much quick darting about that it is hard to see whether or not the person doing the kata has any decent technique at all to the untrained eye. No other kata is as appealing to the uneducated eye as Unsu.

Unsu stands accused by many of being a trashy and shallow kata. Picked so frequently for tournaments by people who clearly have no use for the kata other than as performance art, Shotokan enthusiasts not so inclined often find the kata pretentious and silly. This reputation is only fueled by the fact that athletic young men are drawn to Unsu so strongly that they often express interest in learning it before they can even perform a decent Kanku Dai.

The Thunderstorm
While probably reverse engineered legend rather than fact, some say the entire kata is supposed to be about a thunderstorm. The first movements where the hands spread apart are a squall line gathering on the horizon. The feet drawing circles on the floor are little dust devils being stirred up as the clouds approach. The pointed finger strikes are lightning striking the ground as the clouds come ever closer. Finally wind whips up and blows everything to the four directions - the four block-punch combinations in to North, East, South, and West.

The round kicks performed from the ground are supposed to be indicative of lightning and it's true nature: It strikes from the ground upward into the sky. There is a calm in the storm as the hands spread apart. Then the true ferocity of the storm grabs hold of everything, to the North and the South as you fire techniques in these directions, constantly changing back and forth.

There is one more place of calm in the storm, and then finally, the giant leap is supposed to be a tornado. The kata ends with one final clap of thunder, and then everything is quiet.

If the kata is taken from a folk dance originally, it would explain not only its tendency toward being performance art, but it would also explain why this meaning has clung to the kata for so very long. Perhaps Unsu was originally a folk dance on Okinawa performed to explain the rain, typhoons, and tidal waves.

Maybe not.

Applications
Applications for this kata are not very obvious. Some of the more clever that have been engineered involve the jump and the initial pointy finger strikes. During the opening movement where you spread your hands apart, have your partner grab your lapels or shoulders. Shoot your hands up between his as in the kata. Then, strike outward quickly over his arms.

Next, perform the next chicken-head-wrist blocks so that you acquire two elbow locks on your opponent. Step around behind his feet so as to trip him up, and without releasing your grip, forcefully strike downward into his stomach or groin three times while stepping forward quickly.

The jumping action is usually interpreted as a kick to one direction, leaping over a stick, and then a kick to the rear. Better than that, have your partner stand in front of you attacking. As he comes at you, perform the leap so that you spin past and above him. Land on his back with your hands on his collar, and knock him to the ground. The next technique, grab his head and perform the Istanbul Twist on it.

Some claim that the name for this kata perhaps comes from the applications of it, which seem to revolve around wrist releases and escapes. If this is the case, then perhaps the name refers to having hands like clouds in that they are difficult to grasp and seem to disappear.

Directions for Unsu

1. **Spreading Clouds on the Horizon** - From the natural stance, bring the right foot to the left and cross the wrists in front of the chest. Using tension, slowly straighten the elbows until the arms are pointing out to the sides and downward at 45° angles. Expand the chest and contract the back during this motion. Don't pull the fists back behind your sides. They should go no further than straight out 180° apart. The feet should be touching from heel to toe.

   After a pause, bring both hands palms upward under the chin until the elbows touch. Do this quickly at first, and then with increasing tension. You should never stop moving, but come pretty close when your elbows finally touch. Then

spread the hands outward horizontally from their palm up position to so that they sweep out to the sides. This is not a circular blocking action with the edge of the hands, even though the hands seem to be vertical sword hands. Rather, extend the hands straight out to the sides, as if you are striking with ox jaw techniques. Do this with an initial burst of speed and then with more tension as you extend. After you reach full extension, wait a second and take in the drama. The arms should be exactly 180° apart so that they form a straight line when viewed from above. The shoulder joints should be at 90° exactly so that the hands are extended in perfect line with the shoulders. Be careful not to have one hand higher than the other.

2. **Look Ma, I'm a Gunslinger** - Step forward quickly into a cat stance, lowering your body quickly. Bring the hands down and slide them on the thighs as you make two chicken head wrist blocks. The hands should draw large circles that become smaller as you You will look like a crazed combination of a bird and a gunfighter. Your elbows should be inward of your hands, and the fingers should point at a slight angle downward.

3. **One finger spear hand** - Immediately execute a lower-level pointed finger strike without changing the shape of your hand. Both arms should be very tense in the armpits throughout these three steps with the little circles. When you strike, snap quickly enough that your hand is nearly invisible, and when you bring it back up, it should reassume the tense posture so much that it quivers.

4. **Circle Step and Stab** - Step forward drawing a circle on the floor with your big toe counter-clockwise. The circle should be about 12-14" in diameter. Draw the circle on the floor slowly using only the big toe. Move the toe out in front of the right foot, and then up, around, and back into place. Once complete, pause slightly, then make another pointed finger strike. Pause slightly before going onward to the next technique.

5. **Still Mr. Pointy Hands** - Step forward again, making the mirror image of the previous technique.

6. **The Four Directions Punch** - Step to the left 90° into a left front stance. without drawing the feet together. As you are moving, execute a vertical sword hand block and rotate the hips to the side. Perform the block in mid air. As your foot lands, throw a reverse punch in synch with the stepping action. Turn to your rear and repeat the action by shifting the right foot over about 2.5 feet as you turn. Turn to your left again, and repeat. Turn around and repeat again. As you perform these four punches and blocks, make sure that the rhythm is even - this is very important. Do not pair the blocks and punches in a 1-2...pause...1-2 sort of timing. Instead, block and punch 1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8 evenly for the best effect. Pause after the set of 8 have been completed.

7. **Drop Kicks** - Drop to your right side and forward by not moving your right foot. When you land, you should be on your right elbow and hip with your left palm pressing into the floor. Round kick to the South so that your target is at least even with your head. Snap the kick back very strongly so that there is a very powerful contraction when the heel hits the buttocks on return.

Flip over in place, and mirror image the previous technique. Allow a pause after the contraction of the kick return against your hamstring. Flipping over is harder than it looks. Place the left foot just in front of the right shin. Raise yourself up onto both of your hands as you pivot on your left foot, moving your knees to the right. Set yourself down on your left elbow and then repeat the kick from leg's current position.

8. **Spreading Clouds Block** - Stand up by pushing off with the hands to the South into a horse riding stance. Some people extend the right leg out and then rise. Others prefer to move the right foot out as they stand up. As you stand up, repeat the spreading hands action of the first technique. Bring the palms upward with the fingers curled under, and as you achieve the stance, start spreading them outward. Be careful to avoid bending forward at any time.

9. **Attack Chicken -** Powerfully switch feet and assume a front stance. Simultaneously with stepping back, fold the arms across the body. While stepping back forward with the other foot, left chicken head wrist block to the front and right palm heel block to the rear with the hips to the side.

   Perform the last and this technique together quickly 1-2. Perform a mirror image of the last without pausing such that they both look like one giant four motion technique. (North)

10. **Left Reverse Ridge Hand** - From the right side chicken head wrist strike with your left hand behind your left buttock, pull the right hand back sharply as you swing the left hand around strongly with a synchronous hip rotation to front. Throw a left ridge hand strike to the temple with the left hand. Some people bend the hand at the wrist away from the target, and some people point the hand straight forward as if it were a stabbing action. Be careful that the arm swings away from the body, this is supposed to be a round strike, not a thrust. Many people simply stab with this hand formation, but this particular shape for the hand doesn't work for that type of action.

11. **Left Front Snap Kick** - Raise your knee up into your chest and front snap kick to your chin level. Snap the kick back strongly as you pivot on your right foot, the support leg, and turn clockwise. As you pivot, outside block to the high level with your right arm strongly with your foot off of the floor. Keep the support knee in the position it was in during the kick. As you set your left foot down, reverse punch with the left fist. The timing for this entire sequence is 1...2..3.4.

12. **Repeat the Last Sequence** - Turn to the North 180° pivoting on the rear foot and repeat the ridge hand, kick, block, and punch as a mirror image of the previous four motions. The timing for the four techniques in both cases is 1...2..3.4.

13. **Back to Square One** - Stand up by pulling the front foot back to your rear foot into the both-arms-down-and-out posture of the beginning of the kata. Assume this posture with increasing slowness and increasing tension by crossing the

arms at the wrist in front of your chest and slowly lowering them while pulling them out to your sides.

14. **Feint and Stab** - Turn to your left 45° angle and step forward with the left foot only one half step without any speed, but not in slow motion. Raise the left arm upward in a sword hand slowly gently. As you raise the left hand, the right hand should be in a sword hand as well pointed downward to the floor fairly close to the body. Bring the right hand up and the left hand down, both in sword hands as you begin to step with the right leg. They should pass each other palms inward. Step forward strongly with the right leg and punch from a high handed position downward to the lower level - a sort of dropping punch. The timing of these actions is 111...2.3

15. **Dirty Fighting** - Together as one technique pivot on your feet in place and punch/block to the lower level to the rear without any chambering action, and then pivot back around to where you were to punch to the front again with 1-2 rhythm. Make sure you snap your head in each direction quickly for maximum effect.

16. **Grab and Pull** - Turn to the rear and assume a unmovable stance by shifting the left foot over. Make a slow left-handed vertical sword hand block as you begin shifting the foot and complete the second half after the foot is firmly planted. The block should decelerate as you progress through it until finally you are moving very slowly and with great tension. Don't let the block come to a stop, however, and then move to the next action. Bring the right hand up next to the right ear in an open hand as if you are about to throw an open-handed outside block or sword hand strike.

    Instead you'll bring it in a round trajectory down behind you and then scooping up in front of you as a palm heel strike. Fold your fingers in as you bring the hand around it's path. Rotate the hips to the front strongly in synch with this action. Fold the fingers of the left hand in as well and pull the left elbow into the body a little closer as you bring the left and right palm heels together. This action should look as though you are grabbing someone's arm in your left hand and then adding your right hand to the pull as your left arm pulls them in.

17. **Front Thrust Kick** - The only front thrust kick in Shotokan Karate kata is right here. Bring up the right knee under the arms while leaving their palm heels touching, then thrust front kick to the knee level strongly as you bring the hands back in fists to your right waist in a cup and saucer action with the left fist on top. Kiai on this technique.

18. **Two Punches -** As you retract the kicking leg's knee into your chest, punch with the left hand quickly from the cup and saucer position you were making before. As you step forward into a right front stance, punch with the right hand strongly so that the foot lands as you focus the punch.

19. **Ride'em Cowboy!** - Look to the left 120° and step into a horse riding stance while down blocking strongly. Fold the arms as your right foot passes your left, and then block strongly in time with the foot landing on the floor. Without any

pause whatsoever, look to the left and fold for a left inside block with the right hand in a ridge hand shape. Shift to the left six inches by raising the left foot and pushing off with the right foot. Throw a high level inside block using the ridge hand surface to block with as you shift. Your elbow should finish at shoulder height and be at a nice 90° angle.

Without any chamber at all, look to the right and step with the left foot across into a new horse riding stance with the left foot in front. Block down with the left sword hand in a large arcing action over the head. Look to the right, and as you shift in that direction as above make a high level inside ridge hand block. Shift in place 6 inches as you block. In the same breath as the block, throw a punch with the left hand so that the elbow is nearly straight (don't use a hook punch). Turn at the waist to throw the punch.

The timing of these four actions should be 1-2..1-23 and they are very quick and choppy actions. Beware of collapsing your horse riding stance with all of the shifting. Push those knees outward and keep the stance in a strong arch.

20. **Sweeping Hand** - Turn to the left and assume one of two stances: Either a rooted stance or a back stance with the left foot in front. Which stance you use seems to be a matter of preference sincee even the most famous kata competitors from Japan seem to change which stance they use from time to time. Best Karate Vol. 11 shows an unmovable stance, but Yahara also performs this from a back stance on some instructional videotapes. Take your pick. Also, you can either use a back hand block with the hand in the shape of a sword hand, or you can use a vertical sword hand block for the hand technique. Whatever you do, be careful to decelerate the block as it reaches it's destination, but never let it finish. You'll do the following kick and jump right away.

21. **Laredo Tornado** - Jump into the air off of the left foot. Right crescent kick into the left hand as you push off with your left foot. Your going to turn 360 degrees, but only the last 180° with actually be in the air. Your left arm will be pointing to the rear 180° through the turn before you get off of the ground. The kick is for the most part complete when you jump. When you jump, pull both knees and feet up tightly into the body so that you make the rest of the jump in a little ball. Extend your limbs again only as you near the ground.

    To do the jump at a good height, you need to remember several key points. Try to kick the hand but you'll never reach it if you do the kick right. Make the motion of the kick pull you 360 degrees around and over in the air. This is not a horizontal action, but more of an "over the top" action. You don't rotate in the horizontal plane, but rather at an angle as the Earth to the Sun. Think of a basketball lay-up leap off of the left foot.

    As you land, extend the rear leg as if back thrust kicking, but only at the last second, then land on the right foot and left foot with the hands palm down on the floor pointing in a triangle. The rear leg is supposed to be a back thrust kick. Do not actually try to back thrust kick unless you are pretty good at the jump already - you'll get hurt. You can do the back thrust kick, but it hurts the height of the kick and ruins your chances of getting a good solid landing with all four points

touching the floor at the same time. The landing looks sloppy if you land one foot or hand at a time.

Caution: Repeated practice of this technique on a hard, unforgiving surface such as a concrete slab will result in a right knee that pops and crackles when you are young, and then no longer works when you are over 40. Be very selective about what type of surface you do this jump on. Sprung wood or dirt is best.

22. **The Lawnmower Man** - After a brief pause, step forward with the left foot, and back hand block with left and right hands turning them in a circle until the left hand is at the left waist and the right hand is in front of the right shoulder. This technique is extremely difficult to describe in text, but here's an attempt.

    From the U punch, hook the back of the left hand using the back side of the palm heel posture. The right hand does the same. Move both hands clockwise, keeping the palm heels facing into the center of the circle your hands are describing in front of you. Once the hands are vertical with the right on top in front of the face and the left on the bottom in front of the belt knot, they are really facing to the sides now. Rotate your wrists so that they are back-end leading again as you continue around this circle of doom one more time. This time, the palm heel backside blocks (otherwise known as round blocks) never make it back to the vertical position. Instead, pull them to your sides as you draw the circle a second time. The left palm heel is drawn at the left waist, the right is drawn over-hand style at the right shoulder.

    Step forward a second time and repeat the action in mirror image.

23. **Upper Block Reverse Punch** - Pivot on the right foot, turn sharply 180° and put the left foot over into the front foot position of a left front stance. As you pivot, focus the rising open hand that precedes all upper level rising blocks. As you reach the halfway point of this transition focus a left rising block upper level in mid-step. As you step down, reverse punch with the right hand and kiai. The timing of the entire single step is 12--3. Finish by returning to the both-arms-down-and-out posture of the beginning of the kata.

Unsu



Wankan

The name Wankan is composed of two characters. The first character is the character King. The second character means crown. The name Wankan means "King's Crown."

In standard Japanese, this would be pronounced Ohkan. However, the "wan" pronunciation has been ported over to Japan from Okinawa's dialect. It is interesting that words such as Heian were changed from their Okinawan pronunciation of Pinan

王冠

Wankan/Ohkan – "King's Crown"

while this kata's name is still spoken in the Okinawan dialect. This may say something about how Wankan came to be listed among the 26 kata of Shotokan.

Perhaps Wankan was added to the syllabus later on, after Funakoshi had settled in Japan. It is possible that this is one of the kata that his son supposedly tried to port over to the Shotokan style.

Wankan

This is a relatively short kata which is not very popular among Shotokan Karate enthusiasts. While some people may perform kata such as Sochin, Unsu, and Gojushiho Sho 25 times per week trying to eke out the tiniest improvements in performance, forever hopeful that the kata will cough up one last pearl of wisdom to them, I know of no one who does this with the kata Wankan.

There is another Wankan of Okinawan origin which looks nothing like the Wankan of Shotokan which is practiced in other styles of karate both on Okinawa and in Japan.

The name of the kata is taken from the first three techniques. Movements 1 & 2, when viewed directly from the front, form the two side diadems of a crown. Look at the posture of the arms performing the kakiwakeuke. The 3rd movement, bizarre as it may be, creates the centerpiece of the crown.

The most mysterious thing about this kata is the name and the crown that is clearly created by the first three techniques. Okinawan kings did not wear metal crowns shaped like those of Medieval England. So, how did this kata get this name from that shape in the techniques?

Other names
This kata, like some of the others, was apparently the focus of Funakoshi's attempts to rename the kata into Japanese names. And, like Sochin, Gojushiho, and Jiin, the name did not take. I have no idea why Funakoshi's renaming scheme was so successful in some cases and such a failure in others. He successfully renamed Kushanku to Kosokun - to change the pronunciation from Okinawan to Japanese. He then renamed it again to Kanku (Dai). However, his names of Hakko, Hotaku, and Shokyo were abysmal failures: His own students apparently rejected them as names of kata.



Shofu/Matsukaze – "Pine Wind"

There are two other names given for this kata. One is Shofu, and then other is Hito. Shofu means "Pine Wind." Hito means "Flying Waves." Each of the two words contains a component of Funakoshi's pen name Shoto which means "Pine Waves." Shofu can also be pronounced "Matsukaze." I am unsure of whether or not this kata is the same as the Matsukaze practiced by Shito-Ryu groups or not.

Wankan

飛涛

Hitoh – "Flying Waves"

Directions

1. **Left diadems** - Start from the Yoi: Shizentai - the natural posture. Step with the right foot across the left by about ten inches to your left at a 45° angle. Step out at 45° with the left foot into a cat leg stance. Bring both arms up simultaneously, elbows together, palms inward on the fists, tightly crossed at the wrists with the fists overlapping. Perform this action sharply as you step forward with the right foot. As you extend the left foot, strongly pull the arms down into a wedge block while rotating the fists over.

2. **Right diadems** - Now reverse the action by stepping with the left foot across the right. Mirror all of the actions above to the 45° angle to the right at a 90° angle to your current position.

3. **Crown Jewels** - Face back to 0 degree and draw the right knee into the chest. Point the toes downward toward the floor. Bring both arms up side by side - touching from elbow to fist with the knuckles out and the palms inward strongly.

4. **Here Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!** - step down into a cat leg stance and take two more steps quickly and smoothly, leaving the arms up in the position they are in. Step 1.2.3 quickly. The last step should be followed smoothly and continuously by the front foot sliding forward into a front stance. While the foot slides forward, perform a slow, strong reverse vertical sword hand block - as in Sochin.

5. **Punches** - Perform two punches in place. The first punch is a snap, the second a thrust. The first punch is fast, the second is slow.

6. **Mystery Technique** - Turn 90° to the left by drawing the rear foot up to the right so that it becomes the front foot in a cat leg stance. The left hand scoops, hand open, upward to the waistline while the right hand should be thrust down to the same level with an open palm. The entire technique should look like scooping a kick, holding it, and smashing the knee.

7. Now perform the same techniques you did at the end of 4 and all of 5.

8. Turn 180° to the rear, performing the mystery technique again. Scoop with the left, thrust with the right hand. Draw the left foot over to the left, and then bring it back so that it becomes the front foot of a cat leg stance. Repeat the sequence of vertical sword hand block and the two punches.

9. **Attack!** - Look to the right, back to where you started, and pull the right leg back, and then shoot it out to the side so that it becomes the right leg in a horse riding stance. Strike with a hammer fist to your right about shoulder height. Step forward and front snap kick middle level with the left leg. As you step, perform a left handed punch to the middle level. Repeat the kick punch combination on the right side. Now do it one more time to the left side for a total of three kicks and three punches. Now you are standing in a left side front stance with the left hand extended in a punch.

10. **Finish** - Move both hands to the left waist. Turn 180° pivoting on the front foot of the front stance, and then shift weight so that you end up in a rooted stance to the rear. Perform the Mountain Punch (Yamazuki) with both hands and kiai. Pause a moment and then stand back up into the natural position pulling the front foot back.

Wankan



Appendix I. Ways to Train Kata

- Practice the kata one step at a time with an instructor counting numbers. This is a good way to learn the techniques while in a large class.

- Practice the kata very slowly as if performing Tai Chi. Perform each technique softly and relaxed, moving very slowly and taking about 4 or 5 seconds to complete each technique.

- Practice the kata at a regular pace without any tension in the body at all except for the minimum required to control your muscles. Move at 90% of your full speed ability.

- Stand in the center of a basketball court or open field, and practice the kata blindfolded or with your eyes closed. This is a good way to build balance and to learn to feel for the right movements instead of looking down at yourself.

- Perform the kata full speed with the correct rhythm.

- Perform each technique from the kata one at a time stationary style a number of times – from 10 to 100 – and then perform the entire kata all the way through.

- Perform 10 repetitions of the kata, each time focusing on a new body joint. Sart with feet and ankle position, then knees, then hips, then back posture, then shoulders low and facing correct direction, then elbows, then wrists, and finally neck.

- Perform the kata 10 times, performing each time with a different one of the 23 prinicples of kata good performance listed in this book in mind.

- Perform the kata in front of a mirror in order to work on your technique.

- Perform the kata in front of a video camera, watch your performance, and name three specific things you want to improve about it, and then work to do 1000 repetitions quickly during a month. Then videotape yourself again and look for improvement.

- Perform your kata outdoors to learn a sense of humility. Snapping and popping of uniform sleeves and uneven surfaces make your performance much less perfect than you might expect and reduce the drama created from the noises from the uniform.

- Perform the kata in your dress clothes you wear to work and dress shoes since you will most likely be dressed like this when you find yourself in a situation.

- Try performing the kata in the driver's seat of your car and while getting in and out of the car. Change movements as necessary to allow you to be in the driver's seat and move in some fashion related to the kata. Imagine applications for these movements, and practice them with a friend while seated in your car while being "car jacked."

- Practice your kata very slowly and with great tension throughout your body as if the kata were Sanchin to build strength.

- Perform individual techniques from your kata or the entire thing while waist deep in a swimming pool to speed up your stepping motions and kicks.

- Try doing the kata slowly while holding weights in your hands. Do not do this fast as it may injure joints, but moving slowly with small or medium weights you can easily lift should prove different.

- Perform all of the kata you know all the way through for an aerobic workout.

- Perform any of your kata without any rhythm at all and go as fast as possible to get a feel for a raw fighting usage of the techniques. No slow techniques, no stopping. Full blast.



Appendix II. Known Issues

This document is reproduced from the original information that appeared on the web site called Shotokan Planet which lived at

http://www.24fightingchickens.com/shotokan

This information was heavily edited during 2003 and was going to be replaced by the contents of this document before the site was pulled down on April 19, 2004.

To the best of my knowledge, nothing appears in this document which is copyrighted by another person. The photo of the castle and the other graphics were created by myself in a graphics program on my home PC and scanned from a picture I took of Nagoya Castle in 1994.

There are known issues in the document which I have not attempted to correct:

1. **The Kata Database graphic has an error** and contains 27 kata instead of 26. Bassai-Sho is listed in the chart twice. This is not thought to harm the point the graphic makes or otherwise compromise the image's purpose.

2. **Lack of citations throughout** the document expose that this is not a work of historical research and rigor. This text is basically a "brain dump" of information I learned after reading several books cited in the bibliography. In some places, footnotes are provided, however, in most areas of the document, no footnotes appear. I considered looking up references for anything that might be controversial, and ultimately decided that the works I would cite are impossible for me to verify and some perhaps provide no more security than this text does in terms of academic rigor. In all cases, I concede these contents to be inferior to the work of Harry Cook's ***Shotokan: A Precise History*** and recommend the reader acquire, read, and forever treasure that book and consider it the superior resource to this one. I also recommend the reader find and train with Elmar Schmeisser if he is anywhere within 1000 miles and experience his take on

applications as reverse engineered using his rules through kata. This text cannot compare and is little more than a brochure for their continuing efforts.

3. **Low Quality Graphics** - Graphics are blurry in many places due to the resolution used for web presentation. I decided it was beyond the scope of this work to re-work all of the graphics up to publication quality. The graphics seem legible enough that re-working them seems a costly investment in time and energy that would only further delay publication of this work when it has already been delayed long enough.

4. **Some Comedy Removed** - Because people are now paying to obtain this work, I decided to remove some of the more comical remarks I made about the kata Chinte. I just couldn't bring myself to leave them unedited for people who would have no frame of reference to the previous comic material I frequently published. Old fans of the previous information I had might balk at this, so I preserve them here as bloopers:

    a. **Three Stooges Punch** - Step forward with the left foot and execute an upward rising high level two finger stab to the eyes with the index and middle fingers extended. Pray that the defender doesn't raise a sword hand up and place it on his nose to block. Nuk, nuk, nuk.

    b. **Three Stooges Punch** - Step forward and punch as before with the upward rising action and the two fingers. If the opponent raises a plank in front of his nose, get ready to hit back with a frying pan after telling him his shoe is untied. Woo woo woo woo woo.

    c. **Disgrace Yourself** - To finish, draw the right foot back to the left in the closed feet stance, and perform the hand over fist posture with the right hand in the left fist in front of the chin. Now, hop backwards 3 times about 4 inches at a time. 1-2-3. With each hop, you will feel your testosterone levels dropping farther below zero. Your hair will begin to fall out, and with the third performance oft Chinte, you will find yourself wearing an apron and saying, "Yes, dear." Then you are finished. This portion of the kata is despised by young and old alike.

    It is my opinion that Shotokan enthusiasts should reach out to Shito-Ryu or another style to learn another version of this kata or simply reach out for almost any other kata anywhere instead of this one. This kata is, as we say in the programming world, FUBAR.

5. **Kata Listings are Inconsistent** – Unfortunately, when you spend eleven years creating web content, sometimes one thing gets something that the others do not. Some of the kata have Japanese names. Some of the descriptions are dead serious. Some have some comical names of techniques I invented to keep things interesting, and others are rather bland.

6. **Where are the pictures?** Pictures were added in only to prevent a completely black and white experience for the reader in a minimalist way. At the time these pages were created, modems were not capable of downloading large web pages, and graphics created a heavy load on them and on web hosts. Today, that is not the case.

   So, in creating the work, my approach was to avoid putting pictures anywhere and instead focus on detailed text descriptions for people who were staring at Best Karate or some other kata catalog book and turning it left and right trying to decipher what the next move was exactly. No plans exist to add pictures at this time.

   If the file did contain pictures, it would undoubtedly be quite huge, perhaps too large for a CD if the pictures were up to my own standards, and the entire creation process could require an entire year of full time labor. I don't have that time.

   I may, at some far, future date, add some photos in, but I am not planning to right now.



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Index

Aikido.....64
Anan.....35
Ananku.....35, 36
Aoyagi.....36
application….63, 64, 86, 111, 117, 142, 207, 218
Aragaki.....26, 39
Ason.....20, 21
Bassai. .9, 36, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 68, 77, 78, 80, 126, 132, 138, 150, 186, 187, 188, 189, 196, 197, 198, 199, 201, 202, 203, 211, 221, 227, 228, 248, 255, 256, 258, 274, 281, 283, 285, 286, 301, 324, 327
Bassai-Dai 68, 187, 188, 189, 196, 197, 198, 199, 201, 202, 211
Bassai-Dai.....199
Bassai-sho.....196
Bassai-Sho. 77, 196, 197, 198, 199, 301, 327
Big Four.....80, 203, 227, 228, 247
bunkai.....64
Channan.....21, 25, 38, 138, 139, 206, 207, 208, 327
Chiang Nan.....21
Chinte 45, 61, 122, 132, 205, 267, 268, 325, 327
Chinto.20, 21, 26, 35, 37, 45, 261, 262, 268
Cook.....20, 21, 25, 26, 55, 324, 327
enbusen.....72, 73, 74, 75, 79, 122, 140, 153, 208, 209, 234, 248, 276, 293
Enpi.....9, 45, 47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 68, 72, 80, 123, 132, 163, 178, 203, 227, 235, 247, 248, 249, 303
fudo.....274, 277, 278, 279
Fudo.....274, 277
Fukien.....17, 21
Fukyugata.....35, 171
Funakoshi.....27, 29, 30, 34, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 53, 54, 56, 59, 61, 62, 71, 83, 95, 136, 138, 139, 141, 148, 168, 169, 170, 171, 186, 187, 204, 205, 207, 218, 220, 233, 248, 254, 256, 257, 262, 274, 275, 276, 283, 289, 294, 318, 319, 327, 328
Fuzhou.....18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 28, 33
Gankaku….21, 45, 54, 61, 68, 80, 132, 220, 261, 262, 263, 268, 270, 289, 327
Gekisai.....35, 171
Goju.....55
Goju-Ryu.....24, 35, 43, 54, 82, 83, 84, 115, 119, 148, 171, 207, 218, 221, 255, 257, 274, 276, 284, 327, 328
Gojushiho.....35, 37, 38, 45, 69, 78, 79, 80, 122, 133, 187, 220, 248, 284, 293, 294, 298, 301, 302, 308, 319, 327
Gongfu.....18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 53
Hakutsuru.....37, 38
Hangetsu.....44, 45, 53, 54, 55, 68, 80, 132, 133, 188, 220, 249, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 327
Happo Sho.....36
Harry Cook.....25, 324, 327
Heian. 21, 38, 43, 45, 47, 50, 51, 54, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71, 74, 75, 77, 80, 103, 113, 127, 132, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 147, 148, 152, 153, 157, 158, 163, 164, 169, 170, 171, 181, 182, 189, 201, 204,

207, 208, 213, 223, 226, 227, 235, 237, 263, 275, 279, 284, 291, 318, 327
Heiku.....35
Higaonna.....26, 56, 276, 282
Higashionna.....26, 36, 54
Hyakuhachiho.....43, 207
Ishimine.....55
Itosu.....21, 36, 138, 139, 140, 152, 170, 181, 196, 197, 204, 207, 217, 218, 221, 262, 289, 328
Iwah.....20, 21
Jiin 37, 38, 45, 47, 54, 55, 70, 133, 181, 187, 227, 228, 233, 234, 235, 236, 242, 248, 294, 319
Jion.....9, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 58, 68, 69, 80, 132, 138, 181, 187, 203, 225, 226, 227, 228, 233, 234, 236, 237, 242, 248, 273, 281, 291, 327
jitte.....241, 242
Jitte.....37, 45, 240, 242, 327
Jujutsu.....28, 29, 31, 64, 83, 188, 215
Juroku.....36
Jutte.....25, 45, 47, 52, 54, 55, 68, 80, 132, 187, 188, 227, 228, 234, 240, 241, 242, 244, 248, 255, 256, 258
Kanazawa.....59, 79, 84, 143, 168, 201, 219, 230, 235, 244, 261, 274, 275, 289, 302, 327
kanji.....9, 10, 15, 27, 34, 37, 38, 44, 57, 58, 59, 73, 74, 75, 136, 140, 168, 186, 188, 204, 209, 225, 240, 256, 258, 261, 288, 310, 328, 329
Kanji.....196, 220
Kanku 44, 45, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 58, 68, 74, 78, 80, 94, 132, 138, 147, 149, 158, 163, 174, 187, 188, 199, 201, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 211, 217, 218, 219, 220, 227, 228, 262, 277, 279, 288, 292, 301, 311, 319
Kanku-Dai. .20, 50, 74, 147, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 218, 219, 220, 227
Kanku-Sho.....78, 204, 208, 218, 219, 220, 292, 301, 327
Karate Kata Zenshu.....274
Karate-do Kyohan.....25, 42, 204
Karate-Do Kyohan.....95, 187, 327
Kempo.....18
kendo.....30
Kendo.....30
Kenpo…18, 53, 59, 186, 205, 254, 257, 328
Kensho.....36
Kenshu.....36
kiai....104, 105, 133, 144, 161, 164, 195, 215, 219, 221, 229, 232, 237, 245, 265, 299, 300, 317, 321
Kosokun.....20, 36, 37, 45, 204, 205, 206, 208, 220, 227, 319
Kosokun-Dai.....204
kumite.....31
Kumite.....31, 327
Kung Fu.....18, 55, 227
Kung Hsiang-Chun.....20
Kururunfa.....25, 35, 36
Kushanku.....20, 25, 35, 45, 138, 139, 205, 206, 208, 220, 319
Mabuni.…26, 27, 36, 43, 56, 171, 207, 208, 220, 276, 282
Matsukaze.....37, 45, 319
Matsumora.....26
Matsumura.....21, 26, 37, 55, 170, 181, 187, 197, 198, 206, 262, 289, 294
Matsumura Bassai.....197, 198
Meikyo. .40, 45, 70, 80, 133, 163, 210, 220, 262, 288, 289, 327, 328
Myojo.....36
Naha. .20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 34, 53, 54, 55, 56, 206, 255, 257, 274, 276, 284
Naifanchin.....21, 25
Naihanchi.....25, 35, 36, 45, 168, 169, 182
Nakayama.....26, 30, 38, 43, 44, 47, 57, 58, 70, 78, 79, 83, 84, 93, 178, 179, 187, 201, 219, 235, 240, 249, 270, 274, 284, 289, 302, 327
Nakayama 25
Nijushiho..39, 45, 48, 56, 69, 80, 133, 208, 276, 282, 283, 284, 293, 327
Nipaipo.....36
Nippaipo.....25
Niseishi.....25, 35, 37, 39, 45, 56, 282, 283
Ohan.....35
Ohshima.....187, 204
Oyadomari.....37, 45, 55, 187, 197
Pachu.....35
Paiho.....35, 38
Paiku.....35
Papporen.....37
passai.....197
Passai.....35, 45, 58, 138, 197, 198
Patrick McCarthy.....25, 327
Peichurin.....25
Pinan. 21, 25, 35, 36, 45, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 147, 171, 204, 275, 318
Qing.....17
quanfa.....18
Quanfa.....18, 21

Rohai.....35, 36, 37, 262, 289, 328
Ryuei Ryu.....283, 284
Ryukyu Karate Kenpo 53, 59, 186, 205, 257
Saifa.....35, 36
Sanchin...25, 35, 36, 69, 171, 218, 221, 254, 257, 323
Sanseiryu.....25, 35, 36, 39
Schmeisser. .3, 38, 48, 64, 65, 66, 137, 138, 163, 170, 207, 217, 324, 327
Seienchin.....35, 36, 43, 274
Seipai.....25, 35, 36, 39, 84, 293
Seisan.....25, 35, 36, 37, 39, 44, 45, 55, 84, 115, 218, 221, 254, 255, 256, 275, 293
Seisho.....26, 56, 282, 283
Seiunchin.....35
Shaolin.....17, 18
Shiho Kosokun.....36, 208, 220, 227
Shinpa.....36
Shinsei.....36
Shisochin.....35, 36
shitei.....51, 227
Shitei.....51
Shito-Ryu 24, 26, 33, 36, 38, 39, 43, 56, 61, 69, 79, 84, 115, 139, 147, 153, 158, 171, 197, 198, 204, 207, 208, 220, 224, 226, 255, 262, 274, 275, 276, 282, 283, 284, 302, 310, 311, 319, 325, 328
Shito-Ryu. 36
Shorei.....53, 54, 55, 56, 257
Shorin.....24, 30, 35, 36, 38, 39, 53, 54, 55, 56, 69, 79, 82, 84, 138, 171, 197, 198, 256, 257, 261, 302
Shorin-Ryu.24, 30, 35, 38, 53, 54, 138, 171, 197, 198, 256, 257, 261, 302
Shuri..20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 34, 53, 54, 55, 138, 172, 197, 206, 254
sochin.....274
Sochin. 9, 25, 33, 36, 38, 39, 44, 45, 53, 56, 58, 61, 69, 70, 73, 74, 80, 122, 133, 158, 182, 205, 208, 220, 221, 248, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 279, 283, 289, 294, 319, 320, 327
Suparinpei 25, 35, 36, 68, 69, 84, 138, 207, 218
T'ang.....24, 27
Taikyoku.....42, 43, 95, 137, 171
Tekki...21, 45, 54, 68, 77, 80, 132, 133, 152, 164, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 176, 181, 182, 183, 184, 189, 215, 226, 227, 231
Tekki Nidan.....172
Tekki Sandan.....172, 181
Tekki Shodan.....170, 171, 176
Tensho.....35, 36, 43, 171, 275
The Essence of Okinwan Karate-Do.....208
Tode.....255, 294
tokui.....50, 51, 227
Tokui.....51, 235
Tomari 23, 24, 34, 37, 54, 55, 170, 187, 197, 227, 294
Toudi.....24, 25, 27
Uechi-Ryu.....24
ujutsu.....31, 83, 188
Unshu.....25, 36, 45, 56, 275, 283, 310, 311
unsu.....70, 104, 209, 319
Unsu 39, 44, 45, 56, 59, 69, 70, 80, 81, 133, 163, 208, 256, 259, 273, 275, 276, 292, 294, 310, 311, 312, 319, 327
Useishi.....25, 39, 45, 79, 294, 302
Wado-Ryu.....139, 256
Wai Xinxian.....20, 21
Wankan. .35, 36, 45, 70, 80, 133, 205, 220, 235, 248, 318, 319
Wanshu.....35, 36, 37, 45, 248
Xie Zhongxiang 20, 21
Yoshitaka.....56, 61, 218, 274, 276